About the Cover Photo: Students in Thomas DuBois’ Snow Challenge class document snow at the University of Wisconsin–Madison with Siftr, a freely available data collection and visualization platform allowing users to upload and geotag images and record and share associated notes and field observations (see “Siftr: A Tool for the Folklore Classroom,” this issue).

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It’s a chilly, damp August morning in northern Wisconsin as I sit to write this introduction to a special issue of *The Journal of Folklore and Education* called Common Ground: People and Our Places, a wonderfully diverse issue that brings together themes of space and place, cultural environments, pedagogical practices, and folklore and science. I’ve long believed that environments, sciences, and learning are situated within cultural frameworks. For that reason, I’d like to situate this introduction within my own.

It’s common in my family—a mix of American-born Finns, Swedes, and Sámi who grew up harvesting wild foods as a way of life on the south shores of Lake Superior—to begin our conversations with talk about the seasons and the weather. We acknowledge August’s distinct weather—often humid and fluctuating between cold and hot—that marks its separation from high summer and from the summery weather found short distances to the south. We recognize the signs of summer-autumn (in Finnish and Sámi, eight seasons are recognized rather than four), and we take note of the things we have seen outdoors. The mosquitoes have quieted from intolerable to mere annoyances. The first colors of autumn, yellows and reds, are finding their way into the leaves of trees stressed from disease, insects, or difficult weather. The rivers are low, as is common this time of year, but soon they will be susceptible to autumn floods. We discuss fish, deer, birds, trees, and plants. We do all this before we might think to ask about each other’s welfare, family,

About the photo: Picking blueberries and huckleberries in a pine barrens, July 2014. Photo by Tim Frandy.
or work. Our own well-being is intertwined with webs of relations beyond the human community. Talking about the weather is the same thing as talking about ourselves.

Above all, this time of year, we talk about berries. The latter half of our summer involves rotating through regional berry patches, hidden in the deep forests of northern Wisconsin and Michigan, down logging roads, sometimes many miles away from the nearest house or paved road. Blueberries, huckleberries, raspberries, blackcaps, thimbleberries, blackberries. Sometimes juneberries, mulberries, pin cherries, chokecherries, cranberries, wild grapes and plums. Growing up, my family would spend several weeks in these berry patches, among mosquitoes, black flies, eagles, and bear, filling half a chest freezer with the fruits of our labors, which we squirreled away in old ice cream buckets. Our late summers are still filled with the scents of sweet fern and stink bug, the stain on the fingers, the phantom tickle of the ticks under the clothing, and the real itches of the bites that endure for weeks. We crouch for hours in remote pine barrens to pick low-growing blueberries until our legs ache, and we wear heavy wools on hot days in thorny blackberry brambles until we are drenched with sweat.

Picking berries shapes who we are, and how we interact with our place. We keep our eyes on the weather all summer long. Will there be a June frost that nips the blossoms—and destroys nearly all the blueberries for the year? Where will the berries produce best, given the rainfall this year? We observe the maturation of other plants, comparing them with our memories of previous years, to estimate when berries will ripen. We listen to the woods, the waters, and the weather, and we continue to learn from them every year. Berries are how we think, and how we understand—at least within this season.

Berries affect how we want and expect land to be managed. Berries reflect and shape who we regard as family (you don’t share good patches with just anyone), and a set of old customs dictates the etiquette and norms of appropriate and inappropriate berry picking behaviors, which often supersede actual written law. We remember through berries as well. We celebrate my late ambidextrous grandmother, who could out-pick anyone in the berry patch until she was 80 years old. And my great-grandmother, who would set up camp in a berry patch for weeks, picking all day and canning all night over an open fire. Or even the 80-some year old stranger my father once encountered in the blueberry patch, who clung to a walker with one hand and bent to pick berries at ground level with the other. She picked with a methodical and loving slowness, one berry

A historically productive blueberry year in 2014 left wild berries looking like grapes on a vine. Photo by Tim Frandy.
at a time, placing each individual berry carefully in a pail balanced on her walker’s seat. My father called her his hero. We understood why.

But what I’m trying to get at is not simply about berries. As the seasons change, we fish, hunt, garden, gather, knock rice, tap trees, cut firewood, re-use and re-purpose the things around us in a variety of creative ways. Together, these customary practices shape our sense of time, our sense of place, and our sense of self. We belong to the place—it does not belong to us—to this bigger web of relations in which we have what many Indigenous scholars refer to as “relational accountability” (Wilson 2008, 99). We take what it gives us of its own accord, and we give back what we can to our non-human kin. These beliefs of reciprocal relations with non-human persons are ancient and well documented among Finno-Ugric peoples, and within our everyday practices they endure today, often in new, innovative ways. In the words of one of Finnish-American folklorist Marsha Penti’s collaborators, “It’s in us, this berry picking” (1991, 35).

In formal education, however, local knowledge and local culture tend to be undervalued, whether in the English, history, or science classroom. Although individual motivated teachers still can fight to find ways to engage the local, the last 15 years of educational policy have driven us in the opposite direction, toward the nationwide standardization of curricula and high-stakes testing. Curriculum design requires hard, political choices that privilege certain types of knowledge over others, that advance certain social agendas over others. This phenomena of politicization through standardization occurs as much in the sciences as in the humanities.

We have many classrooms where children learn to parrot that mitochondria are the powerhouses of the cell (information I perhaps have not used since high school), but we have been producing grown adults who are unable to recognize the kinds of trees in the forest, which plants around them are edible or medicinal, or how to read the clouds to predict the weather. How do we expect to protect biologically diverse critical habitats if our general population can only distinguish between evergreen and deciduous trees?

In classrooms, students participate not simply in science, but rather in science traditions that have taken shape over centuries. These traditions enculture: They privilege and marginalize certain subfields; they promote certain cultural assumptions that underlie a discipline; they cultivate specific kinds of relationships between scientists and the objects of their studies; and they create systems of hierarchy, value, and authority through scientific practice. These science traditions are deeply enmeshed with other systems of hierarchy and authority in our world, and the emergent fields of feminist science studies and postcolonial science studies have explored and critiqued how sciences operate to advance colonial and patriarchal agendas (Harding 1992; Crasnow, Wylie, Bauchspies, and Potter 2018).

We see these cultural phenomena play out in our everyday lives, in countless ways. Students are, for example, perhaps more likely to dissect frogs than learn about the threats to their habitat. The cultural dynamics of this curious rite of passage in biology classrooms likely teach us more about how humans should relate to animals than about the frog itself. Students are encouraged to perform their identity as emerging scientists publicly through either the killing of an animal in the name of science education, or the use of an animal specifically killed for the purpose of education. The ethical justification of killing for human learning is determined by a greater community of
scientists, as are the arbitrary lines surrounding a “humane” death. The formal methods of dissection (even the use of formal instead of colloquial names) set it apart from cruel acts of senseless mutilation. The frogs are not eaten, distinguishing our sciences from our dinner plate and our cultural life.

Students must negotiate these tensions and feelings of discomfort (perhaps inappropriately “playing” with a dissected animal to the amusement or disapproval of peers), choosing their own roles as individuals in relation to a broader and socially normalizing community. Some students—mostly young women, in my memory—in acts of protest refuse to participate in dissection. Only a few decades ago, many of these students risked failure of the lab assignment or even the course for their protests. Regardless of one’s stance on the importance of dissection exercises, it is clear that they enculture and engender young people into the shared ethics and values of a community of scientists—even amid threat of punishment for nonconformity. When we pretend that the sciences are somehow not political, somehow not cultural, we are complicit in perpetuating Western cultural hegemony and patriarchy through these disciplines.

Despite the challenges of standardization, many educators still creatively integrate the local into the classroom. One of my uncles is a retired high school biology teacher, and he would sometimes bring in a deer to butcher with his class, or perhaps some walleye to fillet or smelt to clean. In this informal but integrated curriculum, his students learned about animal anatomy and physiology, engaged in local cultural practices, and learned a practical application of food production. During deer hunting season—a major cultural event where I grew up—my uncle would talk about deer leading up to the hunt with his students. Where are the deer? What are they foraging on? Where are their bedding areas? How do cold rain, different kinds of snow, different strengths of wind affect their behavior? How does the end of the rut affect their behavior?

Many of these things I learned at home through dialogue and firsthand observation over the course of many decades. My brother and I learned to “read” the woods, to look for acorn beds, tender tree shoots, and other forage, along with trails, beds, rubs, scrapes, tracks, feces, and the like. We were taught if it was raining, deer would bed in balsam forests. If there is big snow, they bed down. Deer tend to move against the wind, unless the wind is too strong, in which case they don’t move at all…at least until they become hungry. Of course, their movement is further complicated by the nature of the forest, preexisting trail networks, swamps, clearings, and the like. These relatively simple tidbits of traditional knowledge are not static, but rather interpretive, generative, dynamic, creative, and participatory. Understanding those principles allows us to understand what a deer wants to be doing, what it is doing, and what it will likely do next. Having this knowledge puts me in relationship with the deer, and their networks of relations in the forest: their food sources, their bedding grounds, their trail networks. Why cut a healthy oak for firewood, if it’s providing nutritional acorns to a deer? With that oak needing 50 years to mature enough even to produce acorns, perhaps there is better option to heat my home. We work to take care of the deer, and they take care of us. To borrow the words of Ahousaht fisherman Robert Foley, “It’s trying to manage ourselves within the resource instead of trying to manage the resource” (Schreiber 2002, 372).

Our sciences say a great deal about our values as people and how we relate to our place in the world. What social and cultural agendas do they promote? What kinds of power do they perpetuate and contest? How do they marginalize and exclude? How might science classrooms be used to
support and sustain local cultures—the fiber artist, the woodworker, the herbalist? What impacts does standardization of science curricula have on local cultures, local knowledges, and a multicultural world? And how can we work as folklorists and educators to cultivate multicultural sciences in schools, as we have done in other disciplines?

Although science is often masked in a mythos of objective knowledge production, science traditions are largely cultural practices, and they depend on cultural frameworks in process, interpretation, and ethics. Even the “hard” sciences are reliant upon culturally constructed metaphor (to understand quantum mechanics or the 10 to 26 dimensions of string theory), simplified abstractions (Bohr model of the atom; vacuum-based classical mechanics), and meaning making (the philosophy of physics; centuries of speculation over the meanings of Euler’s Identity). In her classic work *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Maori scholar Linda Tuhivai Smith critiques ethnocentrism in conventional Western research, asking: “Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?” (2012, 10). Designing research questions, crafting methods to test hypotheses, and interpreting data occur within cultural frameworks. In the complex and dynamic real-world systems of the life sciences—in ecology, medicine, or public health—science is particularly dependent on these human factors.

Turning science into policy is also a cultural process. In the work of Erika Brady (1994) or Sandy Rikoon and Robin Albee in the Ozarks (1998), Dale Rosengarten (1994) in African American communities, Stuart Marks (1994) among traditional hunters in Zambia, or in my own work on Indigenous sustainabilities (Frandy and Cederström 2017; Cederström, Frandy, and Connors 2018; Frandy 2018), we can see how “conservation” and “sustainability” are often weaponized in ways that advance the conservation of one culture’s lifeways at the expense of another. In the Upper Midwest, non-Native people manage forests for sustainable timber, hunting, and tourism, and not for medicines, birch bark, and berries. In former times, blueberry-producing areas were regularly burned to increase their yield, until settlers who saw fire as destructive began implementing policies of fire suppression (Anderton 1999). Shared social and cultural values shape where scientists invest their energies and how science is applied and translated into policy and practice.

In recent decades, Indigenous (and allied) scholars have challenged the universality and exclusivity of Western science, looking at a wide variety of phenomena like traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) (Jacob 2013, Nadasdy 2007), Indigenous science (Kawagley 2006), Indigenous health care (Walters and Simoni 2002; Walters, et al. 2011), and ethnomathematics (Iseke-Barnes 2000). These Indigenous STEM fields were and continue to be sophisticated, dynamic, and resilient, despite centuries of stigmatization. Today, study after study shows Indigenous-managed lands often have cleaner water and greater biodiversity than adjacent federally run lands (Waller and Reo 2018, Reo and Karl 2010), or that once-stigmatized Indigenous medicines are highly effective (DuBois and Lang 2013). Clinics in Alaska and New Mexico claim great successes through the integration of traditional healers into their patient care, and Native communities have turned to traditional healing to assist with mental health, substance abuse, and a variety of public health challenges.
All science is ethnoscience, and we would be remiss to ignore the problematic legacy of the Enlightenment in Western sciences that endures today. These Enlightenment-based logics not only advanced science, but also helped propagate global colonization and modern capitalism. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley explain, “In sum, European Enlightenment knowledge, natural history, conservation policy, and the language of nature—the very systems of logic that we draw from today to speak of conservation and sustainability—are derived from a long history of the colonial exploitation of nature, as well as the assimilation of natural epistemologies from all over the globe” (2011, 12). It is no coincidence that the celebrated scientist and philosopher Francis Bacon was equally praised for his contributions to the development of the scientific method and his instrumental role in the founding of British colonies in North America. He was even commemorated on a 1910 stamp from Newfoundland, with the moniker “the guiding spirit in Colonization Scheme [sic].”

This legacy endures today in paternalistic attitudes toward Indigenous environmental management, in the dismissal of the efficacy of Native medicines, and in the deep racism in Western archetypes of “primitive” peoples and their cultural logics. According to Bonnie O’Connor and David Hufford, these logics bear connections to the 19th-century theory of cultural evolution:

[M]edicine, like the rest of culture, was presumed to have developed “upward” in a largely linear and unidirectional progression from its crudest, most primitive form into its modern, Western, highly sophisticated state…. This model remains very influential in current popular and professional thought, despite the fact that the evolutionary view on culture on which it was based has been largely dismissed by most modern scholars of culture (2001, 13),

As folklorists, we ought to be able to understand how science traditions shape how science presents itself today, and how racist and sexist structures perpetuate themselves through the production and reproduction of scientific knowledge. As folklorists, we ought to play a role in elevating vernacular approaches to a field whose methods are often dismissive of or even hostile to vernacular interpretations and authorities. As folklorists, we ought to find ways that science education can help strengthen local cultures, elevate subaltern voices, and promote alternative agendas, discourses, and methodologies within the STEM fields. As folklorists, we ought to recognize the creative brilliance of all the vernacular sciences in the world, while being able to distinguish them from the problematic positions of climate change deniers, chemtrail conspiracy theorists, and anti-vaxxers. As folklorists, we ought not be cast as science-deniers because of our valid questions and critiques that ultimately make science work better in a multicultural world. There is common ground to be found between our disciplines, and it is breathtaking.

This two-part special issue, Common Ground: People and Our Places, is centered around the diverse ways that people relate to our place in an environment, in the human world, in the cosmos, through both the vernacular and institutional sciences. Because of the large number of contributions to the issue, it has been broken into two parts—a first for JFE. The two issues are designed to mirror each other, bringing into dialogue educators, academics, and public humanists across several different disciplines, while spanning topics like Indigenous traditional ecological
knowledge, foodways, place making, disaster, language, public folklore, educational technologies, and innovative pedagogies and curricula on the ground.

At least for me, on the ground is where I belong, as both a person and a folklorist, feeling the earth underneath my bare feet. There’s a patch of blackberries not far from here that I’ve been wanting to look at. They should be just about ready, unless someone’s found them first. Or should I drive north to pick more blueberries, where they mature later in the summer? If nothing else, wild rice is coming soon. And cranberries. And muskie. And deer. The afternoon sun has made the day warm and muggy. Which way is the wind blowing now?

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In many ways, large American research universities work to dismantle the importance of place in people’s lives. Universities take pride in drawing students from disparate and distant locales, bringing young people together from “all 50 states” and any number of foreign countries. Once assembled at the university’s campus, students are subjected to a curriculum that often emphasizes canonized cultural materials from far away and overlooks local languages and cultures, be they Indigenous, ethnic, or heritage. As students become socialized into a new “cosmopolitan” way of viewing the world, working with professors and teaching assistants drawn from across the planet, they often sever emotional ties with a home place that had formerly seemed deeply significant but now seems restrictive and irrelevant. Knowingly or not, American universities are often complicit in a process of deracination that prepares students for a rootless and untethered life, one spent following jobs from place to place and often valuing only those locales that are extolled in literature, movies, TV, or The New York Times Travel Section. Where once they spoke with enthusiasm of a local parade, Christmas lighting display, or community picnic, now they chuckle with an acquired sense of superiority about those poor fools who continue to live in the “fly-over states,” “small-town America,” “urban cesspools,” “the boring suburbs,” “the sticks,” or “the boonies.” Despite its state funding, mandated state resident admissions preferences, and avowed commitment to the greater good of the entire state population (the much touted “Wisconsin Idea”), the University of Wisconsin–Madison is one such large American research university.

Recovering a sense of place and discovering the riches or complexities of the local are tasks that lie at the heart of the study of folklore and should be regarded as fundamental goals or benefits of folklore education. As folklore educators at the UW, we know that one of the great moments of teaching folklore is watching students come to the realization that culture occurs all around them: They are not separated from culture, watching behind a screen or through reading a novel, but, rather, are on stage and participating in the constantly unfolding process of culture enacted right
here, right now. A sense of empowerment arises in students as they become aware that they are conversant in complex unwritten customs with deep historical roots. And a sense of respect is born as they come to understand the artistry of people around them—people whom they may have overlooked before or failed to appreciate fully. Many students regain a sense of appreciation for their home place and home culture when they take a folklore course. That they can do so while sequestered on a campus often far away from their homes can only occur if instructors make use of the campus and broader locale as a means and metaphor for valuing places in general and for demonstrating the rich connections that tie people and places together.

In this article, we present an innovative, user-friendly digital tool developed at the UW and now used in folklore courses at various levels to achieve locative education. Siftr is a freely available data collection and visualization platform that allows users to upload and geotag images and record and share associated notes and field observations. The application was developed by an interdisciplinary team of educational researchers, software engineers, and humanists at the UW known collectively as Field Day. When interacting with Siftr, users can add and view field observations using either a specific mobile application (available for iOS and Android devices) or through the Siftr website. In what follows, we present examples of Siftr projects incorporated into elementary, intermediate, and advanced undergraduate UW folklore courses to illustrate the potential and adaptability of this instructional resource to teach students about the richness and complexities of the world around them. Siftr provides a kinetic and visual activity that takes place most often in the outdoors and in the spontaneity of performed culture, but it also dovetails well with in-class activities and theoretical discussions. It is a platform that readily adapts to group projects and invites interaction and discussion that can enrich a folklore classroom, helping students contemplate the myriad ways in which culture is enacted in local contexts.

Folklore and Maps
Mapping has been a longstanding element of folklore research. At the very outset of our discipline, the historic-geographic method used maps to help chart and chronicle the passage of folk tales and other items of verbal culture across time and space (Krohn 1883, von Sydow 1910, Thompson 1953). In the mid-20th-century turn to material culture studies in Europe and then the U.S., mapping and atlases again became important tools for presenting complex data regarding the migration of styles and techniques across geographic and cultural lines (Glassie 1968, Sarmela 1994). In recent years, folklorists have rediscovered the usefulness of maps, creating new products that seek to make archived materials accessible to users in new ways (Tangherlini 2013, Gunnell 2015). While much of this research has relied upon collaborations with professional cartographers and resulted in fairly static maps, the GPS revolution of the late 20th century made complex and continuous mapping a common aspect of everyday life, particularly for people with mobile phones. Siftr harnesses the photographic and GPS resources of smartphones (or computers with Internet connections) to geolocate ethnographic data (images, descriptions) on readily accessible maps, populating concrete spaces and times with relevant ethnographic materials. Once images and notes have been uploaded to a unique Siftr they can be viewed as geolocated icons on a map or via a photo gallery. Users can “sift” or filter through uploaded content by zooming into specific locations on the map, sorting by tags, or searching by upload date and/or keyword. They can also comment on each other’s images and notes.
There are many ways to use Siftr within an educational context, but typically teachers create a unique Siftr and then invite their students to contribute to it as part of a whole class assignment or inquiry project. Additionally, some teachers ask individual students or small groups of students to create their own Siftr as part of an independent field research project. While each assignment should be in line with teaching objectives and may require extensive planning, the act of setting up a new Siftr takes only a few minutes. The set-up asks that you name your project, choose an icon, and give instructions.

You may also identify a color scheme.

Determine your starting location.

Add new data fields.

And, determine your preferred privacy settings.

What follows is a discussion of Siftr assignments in the classroom designed by Ruth Olson, Thomas DuBois, and Marcus Cederström.
Siftr at the Elementary Level with Ruth Olson: Folklore Rules

The elementary folklore class is often a unique experience for students, their one-and-only folklore course, taken early on in their time at Madison or during one of their final semesters before graduation. At the UW, students often take Folklore 100: Introduction to Folklore as an elective or as a course that allows them to satisfy the university’s Ethnic Studies (ES) requirement. Depending on their school and major, students’ advisors counsel students to take an ES course early in their time at Madison or toward the end of their studies. Regardless of when students enroll, however, the course draws robust numbers and reaches a maximum enrollment of around 80 very early during the enrollment period. Other UW students opt for Folk 230: Introduction to American Folklore, a blended course of about 30 students, in which students do preparatory work online and meet in the classroom once a week for active learning—in-class interviews, small group meetings and discussions, workshops, etc. I have used Siftr in both these courses.

Whether they are first-year students or seniors, most UW students enrolled in introductory folklore courses have a very limited perception of what folklore is; one of my goals is to get students to recognize that folklore includes more than folk tales. I want them to understand that studying folklore is studying everyday life, and they can (and should) use their own lives to reflect on social processes at work and make meaningful connections to these processes and the concepts we study in class. During Week 3 of the 15-week semester, I use Siftr as an introduction to fieldwork, asking students to post pictures documenting different aspects of student life or local culture. For both Folk 100 and Folk 230, our Siftr is entitled Folklore Rules, based on Lynne McNeill’s book of the same title (McNeill 2013). Students traverse the campus to photograph examples for four different categories of expressive culture, based on McNeill’s categories of what folklorists study: things we say, things we do, things we make, and things we believe. Doing this out-of-the-classroom exercise early in the semester gets the students actively engaged with ideas presented through course materials, helps them immediately apply concepts, and enables them to find examples illustrating those concepts. It also helps students see folklore as cultural events that occur in particular settings, either seemingly apt for the performance in question or seemingly incongruous. Siftr allows students to view folklore in relation to context and understand the profound ways in which the meanings of places become negotiated through expressive acts.

When someone seeking success on an exam rubs the left foot of the prominent statue of Abraham Lincoln in front of the university’s main administration building, Bascom Hall, the act derives part of its interest because the Lincoln statue is grave and serious in appearance and the statue’s location makes Lincoln a sort of surrogate for university authority and standards. Students in both courses often document the Lincoln foot rub and also debate whether the act constitutes “something we do,” or “something we believe,” as is evident in the image and comments posted by ctrapp in 2016.
Documenting a category like “Things We Make” can include finding someone (or evidence of someone) on campus who participates in a folk art form: a knitter, woodworker, or graffiti artist, for example. Students may document someone’s tattoo or a specially decorated backpack. Students may document customized additions to buses, bikes, delivery trucks, and cars. Once students photograph, caption, and geolocate their finds, they become visible to classmates in a different way—a cultural artifact or practitioner becomes spotlighted by the Siftr, so that other students may take note of the artifact in a different way next time they pass by. Seeing the image on Siftr, students may even feel enticed to seek out the scene to see the artifact firsthand. Collectively, Siftr allows students to build awareness of the folklore around them, connect that to a place, and inform each other about precisely the sorts of phenomena that they are learning about in class.

While instructing students on how to create an effective Siftr post, my teaching assistants and I also use the activity to emphasize the qualities that distinguish a good ethnographic photograph. Images that can be “unpacked” to reveal cultural information are an important part of folklore fieldwork, and students learn how to produce such images while they hunt for likely subjects for Siftr posts. A short handout I provide alerts students to important considerations, like asking permission before photographing, capturing steps in a process, and using the camera effectively to create clear and compelling images. Students comment on each other’s posts and build a cognizance of what characterizes a good ethnographic photograph.

In Folk 230: Introduction to American Folklore, a blended course, I found that students were more creative and energetic in the images and captions they chose to put on the Siftr, mainly because of face-to-face accountability. They knew that once they had completed the out-of-classroom assignment of posting on Siftr, they would be coming back together as a class to select and talk
about their favorite images (and why those images were favorites). I found that after students had completed a short self-assessment, they were not only more prepared to talk about their fieldwork decisions but also more alert to what they appreciated in other people’s images. I then asked them to share with each other in small groups examples they had chosen from our Siftr, which allowed them to practice foundational folklore concepts and vocabulary. In our face-to-face meetings, it was easy to project our Siftr for the entire class on a screen and have students select and display examples they wanted to share and discuss with the class as a group. Often the items selected focused on familiar (and thus recognizable) material such as the statue of Abraham Lincoln at the top of Bascom Hill or the practice of holding up a shoe at kickoff at a Badgers football game.

But students also chose to focus on particular images that they saw as good photographs— aesthetically pleasing, clearly focused on the desired center of interest, delivering complex cultural information. They used the exercise to explore and celebrate their familial and cultural identities, things that the university experience threatened to alienate them from. Class and the Siftr activity became both a safe space and a brave space for displaying one’s cultural identity. The Siftr exercise, undertaken early in the semester, helped students get to know each other and themselves better and recognize the Madison campus as a place where they could continue to practice their cultural traditions as elements of personal, familial, religious, or cultural identity.
Since a goal for both courses is for students to be able to situate their own experiences within the larger context of American culture and history, and to understand the richness of everyday American life, Siftr provides a very concrete, visual, and locative framework for literally inserting their culture into a map of campus. And this sensation occurred not only for students whose cultures differed from Madison’s white Upper Midwest majority culture; white Wisconsinites documented ways in which people varied in customs or practices from one Upper Midwest community to another, as an interesting post regarding the game of Duck, Duck, Goose illustrates, while also coyly referring to the drinking culture at UW.

Through this set of exercises, students expanded their view of what constitutes folklore, became more familiar with the vocabulary folklorists use to talk about cultural expressions, and enhanced their understandings of identity, representation, and place.

**Siftr at the Intermediate Level with Thomas DuBois: Snow Challenge 2018**

The Siftr project Snow Challenge 2018 illustrates how Siftr can be integrated into an intermediate-level undergraduate course, helping convey the complexities of place as shaped by weather and cultural interpretations of it. The project occurs in Folk 443: Sámi Culture, Yesterday and Today. Cross-listed with Scandinavian Studies, this course takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the Sámi people by examining Indigenous modes of expression and worldview, contemporary cultural and political activism and by exploring the connections to Indigenous peoples’ movements throughout the world. In the 2018 iteration of this regularly taught course, the Snow Challenge assignment was worth 20 percent of students’ grades and took the place of an exam for the first third of the course. During this first portion students learned through readings and lectures about Sámi (Lapp) language, traditional livelihoods, and material culture. They read, among other works, Nils Jernsletten’s (1997) introduction to Sámi traditional vocabulary for snow, reindeer, and fish as well as Harald Gaski’s (1999) evocative essay on how learning terms for snaring ptarmigan played a role in his relationship with Elders in his family and with his identity as a Sámi person. Jernsletten avoids exoticizing Sámi traditional knowledge, explaining it as pragmatic information for effective living in the environment and way of life that Sámi have traditionally occupied. He describes specialized snow terminology as a distillation of concrete observations of environmental conditions packaged into a lexicon that can then be shared from one person to the next in the course of daily activities. Gaski explores the expressive aspects of this lexical process, as Elders instill in children a particular understanding of the world along with specialized terms that help describe...
and categorize the world from a culturally specific point of view. These points are important for the course as a whole, as they suggest the importance of finding ways to ensure person-to-person learning in colonial educational systems that tend to atomize and theorize. Many modern Sámi educational activists maintain that the keys to effective Sámi education are frameworks that allow students to talk with and learn from Elders in authentic situations. In an educational context that included—and in some cases continues to include—residential boarding schools where children live apart from their parents for part of the year, guaranteeing such contact is difficult. Further, with the widespread migration of Sámi away from Sámi traditional domicile areas to cities in the south of the Nordic countries such as Oslo, Stockholm, and Helsinki, the challenges of dislocation become even more pronounced.

I wanted the Snow Challenge assignment to help students sense some of these issues in a way that simply reading about the situations would not permit. I wanted them to think about the world they inhabit, the ways their culture(s) may influence their attitudes toward that world, and the ways in which people form relationships with their environment through naming and characterization. Since traditional knowledge tends to be learned not through abstracted processes like reading a textbook but rather through hands-on activities, I wanted my assignment and assessment system for the part of the course related to traditional knowledge to mirror a learn-by-doing education model. In this respect, Siftr proved an ideal vehicle for accomplishing these educational goals.

The Snow Challenge had two parts. In the first, running from mid-January to mid-February, students were tasked with photographing and geolocating on the class Siftr site examples of Lule
Sámi snow terms, drawn from the lexical work of Yngve Ryd (2007). Because Ryd’s text is in Swedish and Lule Sámi, I produced a short translation of a selection of 29 snow terms from the work and created a website containing photographs and explanations.1 Crucial for the effectiveness of this informational website was its responsive design, so that it would look good and be easy to use on a cellphone as students walked outside searching for varieties of snow. The overview of snow terms, also discussed in a class lecture, introduced words for snow texture, quality, distribution, degree to which it is marked by animal tracks, and effectiveness for skiing. I selected terms that I believed would be fairly easy for students to recognize (e.g., bulltje for snow adhering to vertical surfaces like tree trunks or walls) and that corresponded to different times of winter. Some terms, for instance, such as slievar (light, fresh, powdery snow lying on the ground) would be readily visible only immediately after a fresh snowfall. Others, such as maddabievla (an open area free of snow around the trunk of a tree) would become visible only later in the winter, when the snow has settled and begun to melt. Since winters in Wisconsin have become much less predictable in the past decade than previously, I needed a set of terms that would cover snow conditions over a range of different stages of winter. Students were permitted to work in teams, and they used team names instead of their actual names in their posts. They were required to post five images of snow and post comments on the posts of three other teams. I made screenshots of particularly fun or interesting images that students posted and displayed these in my PowerPoint presentations at the beginning of each lecture during the assignment period to help build student interest in the assignment and understanding of the tasks involved. Students enjoyed seeing their posts become elements of the lecture and were eager to see one or more of their images featured at the beginning of class.

The second part of the assignment asked students to reflect on what they had learned from the assignment, relating it to course readings and lectures as well as to their experiences interacting with the winter environment of the Upper Midwest. The resulting essays displayed a wealth of insights that reflected a richer integration of the ideas of traditional knowledge than students might have gotten only through reading. They showed an awareness

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1 Madda-bievla. An absence of snow around the base of a tree. Image by ilovemuohka, Minneapolis.

2 Vahtse. Fresh light snow that makes fresh animal tracks easy to recognize. Image by klp, Madison.
not only of the functionality of Sámi traditional knowledge but also of changes in their personal outlooks that resulted from doing the Snow Challenge, as comments from four students attest:

When snow is on the ground, it was just seen as snow to me. Nothing more, nothing less. But the snow challenge and this class [have] morphed my mind into looking into snow much differently.

A major theme in Sámi traditional knowledge is being able to identify how nature can both impact your survival and be impacted by your activities. One method of identifying these occurrences is through language….Observing these different snow types reveals how they may be used or what they may indicate to the observer. As I was taking photographs of snow, I was able to articulate different snow types that I have seen my whole life but have never had the words to describe their unique features. After learning snow terminology, I could more quickly identify snow types….I found that having a wide range of snow terminology made me feel more connected to my own natural surroundings. This connectivity showcases the importance of language in preserving the Sámi culture and traditional knowledge.

Lectures on language, culture, religion, and more have drawn our attention to a way of life that is so very different from our own; however, for some, it has opened our eyes to the workings of how we ourselves live. Not only that, but it has caused a perspective change, one in which some of us—myself included—have begun to notice little things in our day-to-day lives that we may not have consciously noticed before and how those things affect us.

This project, as well as the readings and lectures these past few weeks, have really enlightened my understanding of traditional knowledge. Before this class, it was my understanding that traditional knowledge does not change. I assumed that this is what makes it traditional. Furthermore, being a science major, it absolutely
has been a longstanding belief of mine that science is far superior to what could be summed up as “old beliefs of people who lived in the woods hundreds of years ago.” Ironically, I have always had a respect for laymen, who have a great understanding of what specifically they work with, even if they do not have a scientific background. I consider my grandfather, who never set foot on a college campus, to be one of the most intelligent people I know. He has spent most of his life as a farmer and logger and knows almost everything there is to know about the flora and fauna that reside on his land. He taught me the difference between all of the different kinds of evergreens, as well as all of the fish in the local lakes. Grandpa knows which berries and wild mushrooms are safe for eating, where not to step in a swamp, and how to track the places where the deer are hiding. The fact that I could not fathom that Indigenous people have an even greater understanding of the plants and animals around them, down to effective medical treatments, in retrospect astounds me.

As these reflections abundantly illustrate, Siftr allowed my students not only to learn more about Sámi culture than they would have by reading alone, but also to think about their own lives, sources of information, and understandings of culture and community. One learning goal of the course calls for “a consciousness of self and other” and states: “Awareness of self is inextricably linked with awareness and empathy toward the perspectives of others.” In learning Sámi snow terms, and applying them to a Wisconsin landscape using Siftr, students come to recognize Sámi views of the environment and also their own. They realize that locale and culture go hand in hand, and that learning happens not only inside a classroom or library but also when outside, interacting with the environment or its various plants and animals. In a course offered at the intermediate level, in which students are expected to integrate their learning more fully into an overall educational outlook, the locative, kinetic, and integrative aspects of Siftr provide opportunities for learning that are substantively different from those that can be achieved in a lecture hall or seated at a seminar table. Siftr offers a tool for a substantively different kind of learning.

Slievar. Light, fresh snow lying on the ground. Image by Apaesos, Madison.
Siftr at the Advanced Level with Marcus Cederström: Nordic Migration and the Labor Movement

I turned to Siftr to find a way to engage students with the study of historic folklore—specifically the laborlore of Nordic migrants to the U.S. in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While there are mapping applications freely available, Google Maps comes to mind, Siftr’s focus on image-based geotagging provided an easy way to incorporate fieldwork and place-based research into the assignment. Rather than ask students to document historic sites of protest or labor unrest, for example, students apply Siftr across time and space to document the unremarkable sites of the labor movement by following immigrant labor activists and their migration to and through the U.S. By documenting the ways that Nordic migrants engaged in the labor movement, we can better understand the history of the working class in the U.S. as well as their vernacular expressions.

My Scandinavian Studies 520 and Folklore 530 course, Nordic Migrations and the Labor Movement, is a blended course with upper-level undergraduate students alongside graduate students. All students are asked to complete preparatory work online before attending class. Class time is designed specifically with active learning in mind, focusing on small group discussions, large class discussions, and a variety of in-class formative assessments. In my courses, I identify three or four content learning objectives and three or four skills learning objectives. I designed this Siftr to help students achieve one objective from each category:

**Content Learning Objectives**
Students will gain awareness of history’s impact on the present by demonstrating an understanding of the vernacular expressions of immigrants involved in the labor movement, specifically in a Nordic context.

**Skills Learning Objectives**
Students will be able to apply folkloristic research methodologies ethically in collaboration with at least two of the following: archives, libraries, community organizations, and community members.

Titled Nordic Migration and the Labor Movement, this particular Siftr follows specific Nordic migrants from across the Atlantic as they engage with the labor movement in this country. Students, working in small groups, are assigned an organization with members who were active in the labor movement in the late 1800s or early 1900s. Some students may work with a specific union, others may work with a labor newspaper, and still others may be assigned a labor temple or hall or even a temperance organization. Once a group has been assigned an organization, each student will choose three Nordic immigrant members from that organization using membership rolls or historic minutes from archival sources. Although each student will be responsible for following the history of just one person, I require students to identify three potential candidates to ensure that the student is able to complete the assignment despite the challenges of conducting historical research on working-class immigrants.

The Siftr offers five categories to choose from: Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Other Nordic, with Other Nordic allowing for smaller immigrant groups like the Faroese, the Icelandic,
and the Sámi to be represented. That Siftr only allows five categories does limit the application for a further expansion of this project to include other countries.

Beginning first with the address of the labor organization from which people are chosen, students conduct research to follow an immigrant from the U.S. back to their home in the Nordic countries. Each student creates five additional points of reference in the Siftr, allowing them to visualize the different paths immigrants traveled to arrive in the same place. Using archives, historic newspapers, online databases, and secondary sources, students create a timeline of an immigrant labor activist’s life. That timeline is location-based and features images available in the public domain or through Creative Commons licensing along with contextualizing information in the form of short captions that include dates and information explaining why this particular place is important (Did the person live here? Did the person work here? Strike here? Attend union meetings here? Write a poem about this particular address?) as well as basic citations.

This assignment carries a high risk of failure, so the assignment is not worth a large percentage of a student’s grade. Conducting research about specific individuals who lived over a hundred years ago can be difficult, frustrating, and sometimes unfruitful. That is a feature, not a bug. In line with both the content learning objective (Students will gain awareness of history’s impact on the present by demonstrating an understanding of the vernacular expressions of immigrants involved in the labor movement, specifically in a Nordic context) and the skills learning objective (Students will be able to apply folkloristic research methodologies ethically in collaboration with at least two of the following: archives, libraries, community organizations, and community members), this Siftr project aims to teach students about how immigration influenced social movements, like the labor movement, on a national scale while also teaching about the challenges of connecting folkloristic research methods to historical projects and giving them the skills to overcome those challenges.

It’s important to note that this assignment is scaffolded so that the research students are conducting here forms the basis of the documentary project that they turn in at the end of the semester. The Siftr is a tangible check-in of the student’s research progress and students present one of their photos to the class. This gives students the opportunity to see what their classmates have added and examine a macro view that includes the work they are doing on a very micro level. Because of the scaffolded nature of this assignment, assessment is left to the students, similar to the Folk 100 and Folk 230 classes. Students are asked, among other things, why they chose a specific image, why they chose to include the caption they did, and how this particular person fits into the context of the class.
Of course, a project like this can present ethical issues. Tracking individuals, especially immigrants, involved in the labor movement has a nefarious history. In conjunction with readings, films, and news articles about that history, we discuss as a class some of those issues, focusing on why taking a historical perspective when examining social movements can be incredibly beneficial to our understanding of history as well as our lives today.

While the right choice for this particular project, Siftr does have limitations like most mapping applications. Because this project is designed to stretch across the Atlantic, zooming in and out of the map can prove time consuming. More important to this particular project is the inability to sift by historical time. Unfortunately, the application does not currently allow for backdating. Students cannot, for example, date a poem to May 1, 1913, but instead must include that information in the commentary. This limitation would be difficult to overcome if expanding the project outside the specific timeframe that I defined in class. That said, with clearly defined categories and timeframe, Siftr provides a visual tool to see individual immigrants’ lives in a broader context—in this case in relation to the labor movement—and to examine folklore studies from a historical perspective, while actively engaging students in the necessary research skills.

**Your Turn: Authoring a Siftr for Your Next Class**

Given that Siftr is a Wisconsin product, and because of Ruth Olson’s continuous collaboration with the Field Day lab, the team of developers who created Siftr (and co-authors of this paper), it was natural that Siftr would become a recurrent element of the curriculum in the UW Folklore Program. But Siftr’s boundaries do not end at Madison’s State Street or the shores of Lake Mendota. Siftr can be used in any classroom anywhere in the world for free. We suggest that folklorists at other institutions and in other course contexts may wish to come up with a Siftr that suits their course content, objectives, and methods. (See pg. 29 for more tips.)

In closing, we would like to relate a story of a single image. In an attempt to make an enticing and accessible database where UW students can find out information about each of the many majors and minors (called “certificates”) available, UW personnel chose an image to display in connection with the Folklore Program. The image is a hand holding a paperback version of the works of
Christopher Marlowe atop a spiral notebook and what looks like a big unopened reference book. While at first glance a seemingly innocuous and even appealing image, the UW Folklore Program staff became troubled by the figure. Although reading is an important part of what folklorists may do (as it is for biologists or economists or mathematicians), reading a volume of an author’s poetry or plays did not seem particularly illustrative of what folklore research is all about. After much work, UW folklorists managed to get the image changed to show a folklore interview. Where the old image seemed to go out of its way to delocalize itself, offering few clues regarding the reader’s identity, location, or culture, the replacement image at least shows an element of folklore's work. But suffice it to say, a Siftr screenshot is a more fitting visual display for the Folklore Certificate. In its constantly shifting, multi-centered, and pluralistic nature, Siftr models the sorts of work we do as folklorists, and the sort of research we seek to invite and initiate our students into through our courses. Ethnographic data gets created by folklorists, processed, and then presented. Siftr models this entire process easily and effectively. Where the student in the UW-approved image reads a static book in some unidentified library or coffee shop, the actual UW folklore student is traipsing across town, noticing culture, photographing, interviewing, comparing, and concretely geolocating phenomena in a real-world, real-time setting. The folklore student not only receives information but helps create and distribute it. The activity pushes against the universalizing tendencies of university education, localizing experience in the way that it actually occurs in people’s lives. We hope that this article allows our folklorist colleagues elsewhere to sense some of the exciting ways in which Madison folklorists aim to instruct students about our field, and we hope that our stories help to inspire you to use Siftr in new ways and in new assignments in your folklore courses.

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**David Gagnon** is a Discovery Fellow and Program Director of the Field Day Lab at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. With a BS in Computer Science and an MS in Curriculum and Instruction, David places the ideals of situated learning theory at the center of his work.

**Endnote**
1. See [http://tadubois.com/Muohta/Snow_Challenge_index.html](http://tadubois.com/Muohta/Snow_Challenge_index.html). I mounted this site as a subpage on my personal website, but it would be easy (and perhaps more effective) to use a simple WordPress platform for presenting such information appropriately and effectively.

**Works Cited**


**URLs**
[https://siftr.org/folklorerules](https://siftr.org/folklorerules)/
[https://fielddaylab.org/](https://fielddaylab.org/)
[www.siftr.org](http://www.siftr.org)
[https://siftr.org/30806](https://siftr.org/30806)
[https://siftr.org/NordicLaborMigration](https://siftr.org/NordicLaborMigration)
Classroom Connection: Develop a Siftr Project for Your Classroom

The following tips will help you develop a Siftr of your own. Anyone who generates a user account can build a unique Siftr project and distribute it to students in a particular course. Typically, the key components of authoring a Siftr include:

1. Identifying the focus of the Siftr, such as an overarching theme, research question, or area of inquiry.
2. Writing an overview or instructions that users can read to learn more about the Siftr. This is often used to provide background information or guidance for getting started and helping users know what to document or pay attention to.
3. Developing categories. While Siftrs do not have to contain a category, they are typically used to help users focus and organize their observations.

Authors also have the ability to do the following:

1. Create a unique URL for the Siftr. When first created, each Siftr is assigned a random URL (e.g., siftr.org/1234). Authors can replace the random characters at the end of this string with their own text. In an earlier iteration of the Snow Challenge assignment, for instance, Tom DuBois named his Siftr Snowchallenge (https://siftr.org/snowchallenge). Ruth Olson has named her annual Siftr Folklore Rules (https://siftr.org/folklorerules).
2. Specify the components of each observation. These include the following categories: photographs, select-one from a list, select-multiple from a list, single-line text, and multiline text responses.
3. Determine whether the Siftr is public or private. A public Siftr project can be found using the search feature on the Siftr.org website and it may appear under promoted, recent, and popular categories. A private Siftr is not searchable and does not show up on any feeds associated with the Siftr.org homepage, but anyone who knows the unique URL can view it.
4. Determine whether the Siftr requires moderation. If the moderation settings of a particular Siftr are set to “moderate,” then any contribution must first be released by an author before the content becomes visible on the Siftr. This means that the instructor for the course (or teaching assistants if the course is particularly large) must approve each image before it becomes visible on the site. If the moderation settings are set to “no moderation,” then the content is immediately displayed on the site. Regardless of the moderation setting, editors have rights to delete uploads and comments made by users.
5. Select the color scheme and map styles.
6. Add additional authors, who by default can serve as moderators.

A few other Siftr settings can be chosen, but the above lists allow you to plan your first Siftr and see how you like the platform. The development team continues to make adjustments and improvements to Siftr, in part in response to the ways that instructors use the platform in their courses.
My colleague Gary Paul Nabhan and I hold formal academic positions as social scientists at the University of Arizona’s Southwest Center, but most of the people we work with know us instead as folklorists, narrators, documenters, storytellers, conveners, advocates, friends, and collaborators. The title of social scientist fits well with our backgrounds and job descriptions. We both earned doctorate degrees, in geography and anthropology, respectively. We teach classes, mentor and train graduate students, research social problems using theoretical constructs, and publish findings in academic journals. In other ways, however, the work we do reaches beyond the conventions of science as understood in most university settings. The majority of our investigations are conducted in partnership with community members, often by privileging the expertise found in local stories and ways of life. We frequently share our findings in nonacademic publications, often directed to nonacademic audiences. These practices complement, and sometimes challenge, claims to academic authority. They lead us to re-examine assumptions about who is an expert; in what settings our academic expertise is needed, invited, or may be redundant; and for whom the findings are important.

Gary and I are not alone in modeling these scholarly practices. We are part of a longstanding tradition of academic researchers who have sought to uplift models for community-involved or participatory research. Revolutionizing the fields of folklore and anthropology with ideas about reciprocal ethnography, citizen ethnographer, community scholars, and the various ways in which academic researchers can help advance an ethical commitment to the co-production of knowledge, these conversations have been taking place in the academy, in one way or another, since the 1970s.

About the photo: The Southwest Folklife Alliance works with Yaqui communities in Sonora and Arizona to honor one of the least understood aspects of Yaqui social history: culinary resistance. The collaboration builds upon research by Maribel Alvarez around the role of wheat in the formation of Sonoran economy and society and by Gary Nabhan and Native Seeds/SEARCH to revive interest in and commercial viability for the 300-year old wheat variety. Read more at [https://www.southwestfolklife.org/yaqui-culinary-resistance](https://www.southwestfolklife.org/yaqui-culinary-resistance).
Folklorists, in particular, have helped lead the way. The idea that knowledge about human behavior and the natural world can exist in rich and erudite forms among “ordinary” people is essential to the folklorist’s worldview. A large part of what folklorists do in schools and communities is help people recognize the inherent value of what they know as insiders of the groups they belong to and the places where they live.

In the last 15 years a new trend has emerged that has pushed the boundaries of expert knowledge even further. Fueled by widespread access to the Internet and smartphones, citizen science is a growing practice that enables ordinary people, often without any formal scientific training, to contribute to scientific research in their spare time. Several headline-grabbing examples of citizen science projects have emerged (Xue 2014). Among them, the Rosetta algorithm created by David Baker at the University of Washington outsourced the scientific work of protein structure prediction to home computers and eventually led to the creation of the Internet game Foldit. In 2007, astronomers from Johns Hopkins and Oxford Universities developed a website to involve amateurs in helping classify galaxies. Tapping into the phenomenon of crowdsourcing, scientists are enrolling citizen naturalists to help assess the ecological impact of climate change and citizen subjects to help develop face recognition technology. In 2014, the Oxford English Dictionary formally recognized the term citizen science. The Citizen Science Association, based at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, lists more than a thousand projects currently open for public participation.

Since the early 2000s, Gary and I have worked, jointly and independently, in a variety of projects involving ethnobotany, Indigenous agronomy and foodways, desert arid lands, and transborder social dynamics. We have discovered that the modes of engagement most effective for empowering communities often lead in the opposite direction of the conventional assumptions of social science projects. For example, on some occasions we have questioned whether all the information that collaborators shared with us needs to be, or should be, published. Whether we are looking at uses of water in the Sonoran Desert or economic food initiatives in an urban neighborhood, our distinct lines of investigation frequently confound the boundaries where science ends and folklore begins. In some instances, the lore of desert living is the science: When will the rains come, what signs can be detected that rain will be abundant or scarce, why are washes in the desert unpredictable, how do ancient beliefs about waterways play out in conditions of water scarcity and climate change?

Minding questions of ethics and authority at the outset of an investigation changes the position and subjectivity of the researcher—it makes you humble and attentive in a special way. It also redefines what is at stake in the core scientific inquiry. For example, when Gary and I began a project a few years ago dealing with agricultural conservation of heritage wheat in the Arizona-Sonora Desert borderlands, our research questions quickly became entangled around inquiries of cultural memory, ritual and ceremony, resistance, sovereignty, and indigenous sustainability.

It was in this context that, in our own distinct arenas, we became curious about the possibilities of aligning what we were doing with the new principles and methods of citizen science. We were intrigued with the idea of a widely democratic research design that allowed ordinary people to set the terms of engagement with scholars or to drive the process of determining which questions needed to be prioritized in their local settings. Gary led several successful citizen science projects in the Tucson Basin identifying plants, their flowering times, and relationships to wild pollinators.
Adapting the concept further, I began to explore how a citizen folklorist approach to knowledge gathering in the Southwest could articulate a different relationship of authority and decision making between the university and the communities affected by our inquiries.

We believe these insights can apply to other educational settings and can help teachers re-imagine how to involve students in ethical practices of cultural and social investigations that place community members’ desires, needs, expertise, and aspirations at the center of the project.

Below we share excerpts from a transcribed conversation that took place in February 2018 in which we explored our journeys, experiences, and insights working with citizen scientist and citizen folklorist approaches. We believe a conversation is the most appropriate format for modeling the kind of learning and authority sharing that we advocate. As a narrative genre, a conversation is characterized by fluidity and the co-creation of meaning: One person’s idea triggers another’s, and together they negotiate the credibility of the stories shared. The best findings in citizen science and citizen folklore often emerge as the result of conversations among peers—neighbors, residents, students, parents—and, occasionally, also in respectful exchange with a scholarly expert outside the community.

Gary Nabhan, W.K. Kellogg Chair in Southwest Borderlands Food and Water Security, writes extensively about food and place. He is an ethnobiologist, agroecologist, conservation biologist, and cultural geographer engaged in a number of biodiversity endeavors.

Gary has published more than 35 books exploring the interface between deep scientific knowledge of a place or region and its social and cultural character. He is internationally respected for his advocacy on behalf of “eating local” before this notion was widely known. A MacArthur Fellow and a founder of Native/SEED Search, his latest project involves the mapping and restoration of pollinators across the U.S.-Mexico border. My work as the Jim Griffith Chair in Public Folklore at the University of Arizona and Executive Director of the Southwest Folklife Alliance has led me to interact with dozens of ethnic, folk, and tribal community partners engaged in a wide range of inquiries of cultural preservation, economic development, and cross-cultural understanding. The agendas and priorities for these projects are often set by community partners in their own time, place, and terms; my participation or SFA’s role becomes that of enabler, coach, and facilitator, sometimes only in the background. As a former Trustee of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress I have a special interest in documenting new, cutting-edge technologies of participation that can assist folklorists and communities come together to gather and share knowledge.

Work Cited
Definitions and Frames

**Maribel:** I think we should start this conversation by considering what we each understand by the concepts of citizen science and citizen folklorist.

**Gary:** Citizen science emerged from both the non-formal environmental education world and scholarly groups on university campuses, like the National Phenology Network. The network uses citizen participants to track the life cycles of flowers. My take on it is that we don’t have just one model of citizen science, but many. The various approaches can include work done under the direction of a scientist to gather very specific types of observations, work that the scientist performs on behalf of a public interest (like expert witnesses do), or work that members of a community take upon themselves to educate and redirect the efforts of a scientist. Sometimes these occur simultaneously and are in collaboration with one another, and at other times they’re in creative tension with one another. My own work with the Comcaác Indigenous people in the Gulf of Cortez, Sonora, and to some extent with O’odam tradition bearers in Arizona, has unfolded under this larger umbrella I’d like to call participatory science. The same practices that we call citizen science are embedded already in what many indigenous communities do trying to teach themselves what traditional ecological knowledge they can recover and hold onto for new generations. It is taught by community tradition bearers through a method of primary observation. The difference between citizen science and indigenous participatory science in this manner is that the observations in the participatory or indigenous setting contain the traditional knowledge, practices, beliefs, and stories of multiple generations. In other words, the process of data gathering does not begin with observation, but instead observation grows out of the knowledge that shapes our vision of what to observe. It’s not one or the other, or linear. For traditional communities, those two things are melded in a beautiful way.

**M:** Very interesting; part of the received wisdom of a community is knowing what merits attention and what does not. The recent interest in citizen science illuminates certain aspects of the production of knowledge that are crucially important for science. It is a way for science to refresh its perspective and be more effective. In a way, all great scientific discoveries in history emerged out of testing probabilities that were not previously considered. Yet, we also see in the enthusiasm about citizen science our tendency to celebrate as new practices that for some communities have been standard operating procedure since ancient times.

**G:** You know, one of the most interesting examples of this I know of happened in the Sonoran Desert. It concerned observations of a desert bird called the Poorwill. The scientific consensus was that this bird flew south for the winter like other birds. And the Pimas, whose ancestral home is the Sonoran Desert, kept on saying, “No, no. They don’t. Look at their plumas (feathers), they are camouflaged with the rocks. And during the winter, they go to volcanic hills where they’re completely camouflaged and you can walk within a foot of them, and they stay quiet because they know that’s their protection. And so, we know that they stay here all winter and if you guys watch carefully, you’ll see them too.” Finally, an ornithologist listened to the Pimas and published a

correction to the scientific knowledge of record saying, “The Pima understood that these birds stay over winter here, and we have to acknowledge that.” So, what I love about this is the lesson that scientific endeavors must always be approached with great humility.

**M:** That’s an important lesson, indeed. The way citizen science has developed in the literature and through common practices over the last 20-plus years implies and accepts what today we call a DIY approach—or do-it-yourself. Basically, a scientist entrusts the nonscientist or the amateur scientist to gather data; this assumes a trust in the ability of the grassroots researcher to identify what is relevant data and what is, on the contrary, just stuff, or random phenomena, or noise. I find this element of trust to be one of the most interesting distinguishing characteristics of the citizen folklorist and citizen scientist approach. By valuing trust in the ability of the non-credentialed investigator we are pushing the envelope beyond community consultation. We are in fact realigning whose credentials are a better fit for different situations. In my work, sometimes I have assumed a role that is suited to the kind of skills I bring—like grant-writing, for instance. As a credentialed folklorist it can feel awkward to be assigned a role in a project that is primarily managerial, but this makes sense if that is the one thing I can bring to the common inquiry as an expert. I need to trust my co-narrators to know what questions to pursue, how to interpret what matters, and how findings affect the lives they are living. Sometimes I have experienced the opposite: The community has all the know-how and management capacity but they are in need of a frame for interpretation or a theoretical construct to make sense of why this thing is happening in this particular fashion. They call on me to offer larger frames of interpretation, comparative skills, or analytical tools.

**G:** I think we need to challenge our colleagues in the academy to clarify what we mean when we say a project run out of the university is participatory. Just as there are many varieties of citizen science—some in which the citizen part simply means that the scientist speaks up with courage about some controversial issue, like climate change—there is a range of understandings about what it means to engage the folk in participation.

**M:** I agree; participation can be defined in many ways. Sometimes we call a project participatory because we asked a bunch of questions—questions that we came up with based on our own understanding of what is relevant or important to know. If people are nice to us or polite and answer our questions, we say they participated. But that covers up in shadows a whole lot of steps. True participation of people on the ground of our community settings means making room to be shaken out of our previous assumptions or given knowledge.

**G:** Too often we lead with our assumptions; that can make for either terrible or wonderful science. Assumptions can be disguised as hypotheses—it is where we all start from, whether we acknowledge it or not. How are you applying the citizen folklorist approach in the work of the Southwest Folklife Alliance to find equilibrium between what is known and what is yet to be imagined?

**M:** We first used the concept of citizen folklorist to gather data about culturally diverse end-of-life practices. There was a real need in the community, among hospice workers, medical service providers, and even funerary home directors, to talk about cultural differences in how people talk about and experience death and/or planning for death. It was a big project, and we had limited
resources. In fact, we had only one folklorist in the project; it was she, Monica Surfaro Spigelman, who came up with the idea of amplifying our team of experts by recruiting a cohort of volunteers we could deploy to work in the community documenting end-of-life practices. Monica knew this was exactly how scientists were using large volunteer networks to dig into pools of data (like stars in the universe) too large for one person to manage. She said, “We’ll convene a group of citizen folklorists,” and the concept rang a bell. We began with 35 citizen folklorists; they researched end-of-life beliefs among groups it would have taken a single credentialed folklorist years to build rapport with. It has opened opportunities in different levels. We now have a way to validate the inherent skillfulness of neighbors to talk to neighbors about what they know to be true of their own lived realities. In some ways, this is not new. This practice is at the core of what ethnographers hope to do and often do, that is, understand the world from the point of view of the person who is an insider to that culture. But there is a slight qualitative difference in how we are using the concept of citizen folklorist. We did more than consult or interview “informants.” We also recognized the skills of inquiry and intellectual prowess of the community scholars or citizen folklorists who did not have a degree in folklore. We trusted they would get good data without our having to monitor their performance as researchers.

G: Yeah! That is so wonderful to be able to multiply the learners and the experts all at once. And it’s remarkable how much citizen science has grown not only in the number of people participating in it, but its influence on science overall. In studies of the Mariposas Monarcas, the Monarch butterfly, for example, one-third of all scientific papers acknowledge that they could not have learned what they learned about this endangered beautiful species had it not been for the data gathered and submitted by the participatory citizen science networks of schoolchildren and retired people recording where Monarchs were seen on their migration—both in the U.S. and Mexico.¹ Then there’s something else: the cultural meanings embedded in making those observations. Think about it. The Monarchs are kind of the Dreamers of the butterfly world. They come across the border and have status in both countries. And without those citizen scientists [on both sides of the border], we would not have enough knowledge to honor that. And now, the movement on behalf of immigrants brought to the U.S. as children, also known as DACA or Dreamers, have embraced the monarch butterfly as their icon; a symbol of those seeking safe passage across the border.

Ethical Horizons

M: Now that you mention the Dreamers, let me say something about the use of the term citizen in the concepts citizen science and citizen folklorist. The word citizen in these contexts does not refer to someone’s legal residency status—it is not a judgment on being documented or undocumented. Citizen in the present context evokes its early use in the formation of liberal democracies—an autonomous individual whose self-dignity matters in a system of political liberty (not a subject of a monarch or a feudal lord, for instance). Citizen is a word related to the emergence of what we call civil society, or the uncoerced, voluntary participation of social actors as part of a collective.² The use of citizen applied to any occupation usually implies individuals acting out of free will toward a social, common goal. I found a curious reference about the notion of citizen soldiers in the struggle over Texan independence in the 1830s. For most of the period before the Civil War, the various governments claiming sovereignty for the Republic of Texas relied upon ordinary citizens to volunteer for war and defense of borders. Most of the initiative to form these militias came from ordinary members of the community; no government agency drafted or coerced them.³ I believe this notion of independent agency carries through in the citizen folklorist and citizen...
science concepts. People step up to play the role of “scientist” and “folklorist” out of their enthusiasm for the projects, regardless of whether they hold formal degrees in these fields or not.

**G:** Well, what you are saying is that at some point in the evolution of science and folklore as fields of study, knowledge was co-opted by the professions. The production of knowledge was assigned to experts and barriers were set in place to safeguard which forms of knowledge counted as valid. Medicine became a science and popular methods of healing became “folk medicine.” Same thing happened with music, or architecture, or botany and biology. In other words, knowledge became a privilege of those who could attain it. This conception of knowledge as a way to enforce social hierarchies is so diametrically opposed to the experiences I’ve had working with wonderful indigenous and ordinary people all over the world. I’m humbled so much by what common working people know, that we academically trained Western “scientists” don’t know. And I don’t mean this in a romantic way that attributes some supernatural powers to indigenous communities. I mean, traditional knowledge entails hard work. For instance, the Comcaác in Sonora, they are also called Seri, we’ve had workshops where we train young people as *Paracólogos* (assistant ecologists), back to back with the Seri Elders and so-called academic experts on sea turtles. A *Paracólogo* is like a first responder to wildlife. Over 400 Seri have participated in that program. They had observations about where sea turtles gather their food in the Gulf of California at different times in the year and at what water depths. That information astounded the Western scientists. They said, “We just thought they disappeared. We had no idea that people knew where they were.” The Seri also reported egg-laying nests far beyond what the Western scientists knew because they were walking on the beaches a lot. And there is this wonderful running thread between the science and the folklore. Yet, it was there, in the old songs and stories. My wife, Dr. Laurie Monti, and others have recorded dozens of Seri songs that alert people to watch out for what’s happening at certain times of the year.

**M:** Of course, that makes so much sense. I’ve always found helpful an article written a few years ago by the folklorist Steven Zeitlin, from New York’s City Lore, entitled “I’m a Folklorist and You’re Not.” He explains how at different crossroads in the evolution of folklore as a field of academic study and as a practice of public cultural advocacy and production, people have applied either “expansive” or “delimited” strategies to define who is a folklorist, and also possibly who ought to be involved in deciding and interpreting cultural phenomena. Zeitlin makes a point about the inclusion of folk-based artistic expression in the canon of American Art (capital letters) that I think applies equally well to the enterprise of citizen science and citizen folklore. He says that a folklorist is someone forever involved in the process of “recentering what others consider marginal.” He frames this statement within a logic model: Why would anyone interested in human knowledge and human quality of life be fine allowing entire forms of data that can help expand truth fall through the cracks of science?

**G:** So true. Yet in the efforts of trained expert scientists/foolklorists to do good, we see a lot of concern about “giving people a voice.” I understand sometimes that is needed. But from the stories we are sharing, I derive a different conclusion. It seems to me people are talking all the time, but is anyone listening?

**M:** Exactly. In our work training and deploying citizen folklorists in an urban Mexican/Chicano barrio in South Tucson, for example, we realized that only a collaborative approach that demanded...
listening at the outset would have any credibility with that community. People had grown weary of talking in vain; they had answered survey after survey that had come their way via university interns and grad students. The neighborhood was experiencing asset-mapping fatigue by the time we came in contact with them. Regardless of how we saw ourselves as folklorists, the university-backed folklore alliance was part of what folklorist Mary Hufford described as “the grid.” The more interesting things people had to say were off the grid and in what Hufford calls “the cracks,”—a public space for what might be left out. But, as you can imagine, even as the unheard speak, one of the criticisms leveled at citizen science is the question of reliability: Can the work of non-expert collaborators be counted on as accurate, or objective, or acquired by sound methods, or trustworthy? Fears about citizen scientists or citizen folklorists dumbing down the professional standards used to be expressed more openly a few years ago. What these fear-based responses missed was a recognition that the aim of folkloristic, grassroots, and citizen-driven inquiries is to complement, rather than replace, scientific knowledge. The folklorist Bert Wilson said years ago something that now renowned medical researchers are saying loudly to encourage citizen patients to help doctors understand things like chronic pain: People have a way of responding creatively to the circumstances they face. That is the bottom line of citizen folklore and citizen science: a fundamental appreciation that people observe their surroundings, interact with other species, negotiate changes in their environments, and adapt to variable circumstances, and that in doing all these practical living routines they accumulate bodies of knowledge that scientists and folklorists living outside those same predicaments may easily miss.

Reliability

G: We cannot be blind to the frameworks of intellectual authority we work with. This reminds me of a story. So, one time we were doing a desert survey and one of our Seri collaborators, a vastly wise tradition bearer from whom we learned so much, Humberto Morales, said to our group of students from Arizona, “Oh, look! The ocotillo is in bloom! That’s the alert that sea turtles will be migrating into our water soon.” And one of the students laughed and said, “Well, the sea turtles can’t see the ocotillo, I mean why do you see a correlation there?” And Humberto, who was very smart, replied, “They are being triggered by the same global processes. I’m not saying that the sea turtle is seeing the ocotillo and is deciding to come up here, we wouldn’t be that dumb. We’re talking about the things that link us. Knowing the lore about the ocotillo is what alerts us to begin to look for the sea turtle.”

M: Wow. Right on. Reliability is a tricky subject for the university-trained mind. Sometimes I think what we are really saying when we question the reliability of stories people tell us about topics we’d rather be experts on is that there are certain things we’d rather not know, either because it does not fit into the scheme of how we imagine things ought to be or because the “talk back” hurts our egos. Sometimes, the knowledge shared by common people upsets the political ideals we have brought to bear into our research. For example, if you are a middle-class person who has benefited from orderly administrative procedures in zoning, taxes, labor laws, and police protection, it may come as a shock to hear that those same systems regularly fail or even injure poor people. When we confront these dissonances in the field, we retreat to our scientific mentality and question the validity of data [Chuckles]. Gary, remember when we worked on that project a few years ago with ranchers in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands? We heard the ranchers tell us about the problems they were having with their cattle on the border—from the undocumented crossers to the trespassing of human traffickers to raids by the Border Patrol. These guys were trying to
raise cattle in contested territory. And at the end of the day, whether these guys were espousing beliefs that confirmed points of view about the border by Right or Left intellectuals and activists, they knew what they knew. And I remember we found ourselves in the position of having to listen, because we had invited them to the table and now it was their turn to speak.

**G:** Yes, I remember. They knew what they knew. And so, this raises the issues of the political divide we see in this country right now, that rural and urban people vote differently and speak about issues differently. And sometimes I think that those divisions are so deep in the wounds that are still so raw and that is, in part, because rural people have had 40 to 50 years of experts saying, “What you know about your reality doesn’t count as much as what I observe.” I’m hoping that the gracious consideration of citizen science by academic and government scientists, and not to mention commentators and pundits of all kinds, can help heal that wound and there can be mutual learning, rather than this deep divide that is really ripping apart our country right now. That’s what my new book is about—*Food from the Radical Center: Healing Our Land and Communities.*

**M:** One of the goals that advocates for citizen science express frequently, and I will say it is probably also true for citizen folklore, is to change the profession itself—Science or Folklore—to be more accountable to the people most affected by our research studies. But this leaves a door wide open for interpretation: Who should be accountable to whom? Should the volunteer researcher without formal training be accountable to the standards of the academic scientists/folklorist? Or is accountability a two-way street, and the scientist/folklorist must be accountable to the ones who hold the knowledge she wants?

**G:** Let me shuffle the question a bit. The critique I would have of accountability and veracity arguments is that, in a true sense, to do science that really matters we need to involve the participants in defining the problem we aim to study. If we want to change the way big Science or big Academic Social Science engages participants, we need to start by inviting people to our projects early, in the design phase. Together with the community we need to ask, “What’s the problem that’s most important here? What hypothesis are we testing? And after you collect data and compile it, would you like to be in the brainstorming session where we look for the patterns?” Instead, what we see is that many institutions ask participants—even those most affected by, say, environmental racism, where toxic material is affecting their families—to go out and get data for someone else’s hypothesis, and they are not even acknowledged on the papers that are published, necessarily. So, I think there’s a very interesting ethical issue here; but, more importantly, how do we involve the people who clearly are asking those questions in their heads? How can we include them in formative stages, not just in the data-taking?

**M:** I believe the folks who teach and practice participatory action research have done a good job at codifying the best practices in this area. The problem is that we have few mechanisms to gauge whether the participation levels are authentically horizontal or if it is only the rhetoric of participation that is reported in grants or press releases. There is a growing, beautiful movement now in something called equitable evaluation. Several large philanthropic foundations and professional evaluation associations are promoting this shift to create metrics that can allow us to determine whether a project in fact walks the walk of inclusive and equitable participation instead of just talking the talk we all love to hear. The idea is not to be the police of participation and make
researchers check off boxes, but to inspire an honest conversation about who and how someone benefits when we study a social problem.

G: Right, because many nonscientists and people in the communities where we work have wonderful life experiences in which they can do the critical thinking to say, “I’ve collected this data, but I’d like to see the pattern and debate with you what that pattern means.” And so, what we might say is that anyone hoping to do participatory science in the best possible manner is still carrying the baggage of our institutions with them. And those issues need to be resolved if projects are to bear the greatest fruit for everyone, not just for the university or the national society that eventually owns the data.

M: I think along with that we need to rethink how and where we publish our findings. In the work the Southwest Folklife Alliance has done, we have opted for a variety of formats—small pamphlets, monographs, Spanish translations, online journals. We have established agreements with our citizen folklorists for publishing the work they do and support them as well with a professional editor, because you may be a great observer but have difficulty getting your knowledge into writing. So, I think we try to think of ourselves—the professional folklorists—as coaches and capacity builders of the folks on the ground. I have even talked about a wraparound model, borrowing from the social work and clinical therapy fields. The wraparound must also consider compensation, even though the citizen science model is predicated in volunteerism, and one of its great benefits is the cost savings that may otherwise impair the research to take place at all. We also need to look at grant budgets through a lens of equity: Whose work are we declaring has more value with our budgets? And I am not in any way discounting the value of skilled specialists here. We hire academic ethnographers all the time to help support citizen folklorists on the ground. But equity really means distributive value. This is a horizon we have yet to conquer with regard to the insertion of community scholars into our projects. For too long science has been constructed in opposition to vernacular or folk or traditional knowledge, under a model of extraction. Even if we feel we are invited into communities, to participate as collaborators, we must also ask, what do I leave behind or reinvest or leave untouched because it’s the right thing to do?

G: That’s right. The good thing to emerge from the citizen science movement—and I hope it is what you are doing with the citizen folklorist concept—is that we are now in a better position to abandon the viewpoint that somehow citizen science is inferior to academic or government trained scientists. We need to honor all the contributions to knowledge that can help us save the planet with respect and consideration. That’s the only way we get alternative hypotheses and innovation, both about the past and the future.

Practice in Motion

M: I am encouraged by the increasing use of the framework of citizen folklorist to address the needs of communities. The Brooklyn Arts Council announced a series of training modules for community scholars in 2017 called Citizen Folklife with the tagline “Reclaim culture in your neighborhood.” The call for participants asked residents to sign up to become a Citizen Folklorist and explicitly stated it believed “the next stage of folklife documentation and advocacy” will be powered by the knowledge and media created, controlled, and shared by tradition bearers and their communities. This is an important benchmark for folklorists; to speak about a next level in folklife
documentation is also a way of acknowledging that some practices of the past are due for critical revision. Even though citizen folklorist sounds much like the extant practices of community consultation that folklorists and educators have used for decades, I find this more recent approach offers a new sharp edge of ethical engagement that moves the commitment to equitable participation a few degrees in the dial. The idea is not new, and neither is the spirit of collaboration with community members. But there is a heightened awareness about positions of authority in the new approach, reminiscent of the upending of roles and validity of truth claims performed by feminist folklorists and ethnographers a few years back. 10 In a recent gathering we organized through the Southwest Folklife Alliance I was confronted with the qualitative difference that I am speaking about. The meeting gathered 45 Muslim women in Tucson in conversation around a shared dinner about end-of-life traditions. The professional folklore organization provided all the funding and logistical support for the event, but the entire agenda of the meeting was developed by hosts from the local Muslim community. The women had identified a list of questions to guide conversations at the dinner tables and served as facilitators and curators of the event. I was in attendance as notetaker at one of the tables. Other folklorists played the same role. Our role extended beyond the event as editors and publishers of printed and online materials, but the central driving force of the inquiry was powered by the community most affected by the topic. This was a rewarding experience that taught me a great deal about a subject I actually knew quite a bit about, yet having the intentional role as listener and behind-the-scenes collaborator offered a different perspective. After the gathering, one of the lead hosts told me how much she appreciated the definition of roles we had enacted and how clearly it communicated a shift on values—we aimed to serve the community, she said, and demonstrated this by trusting them to speak their truths freely. I wonder, how can we advance this practice in other settings, especially around more explicitly scientific inquiries?

G: I can see educators in other settings adopting some of the techniques of citizen science and citizen folklore to advance projects among students, residents, farmers, gardeners, and others. If I could offer a few simple guidelines to amplify the impact of these projects I would mention three key points. First, establish a large goal or umbrella under which many different topics or lines of investigation can fit, for example, “Climate Change.” By making the overarching theme large you create opportunities for many kinds of projects. Second, involve the people most affected by the theme: residents along a river or a coastline, hikers on trails, children in parks, and such. Third, resist the temptation to segregate the project team into data collectors and data interpreters, especially if the latter function falls to team members with academic credentials.

M: I agree. Theory emerges from the active process of interpersonal exchange and interpretation. Sit together in a room professional scientists or folklorists alongside community participants and study the patterns and deduce meaning out of the data collectively. In my view, this is the most important shift we can make. When we open this door, we also open ourselves to hearing the most wonderful tales of biological and cultural adaptation, often rooted in stories people have shared through generations.

G: These are forms of knowledge we cannot afford to ignore; as the world’s problems grow in complexity, we need all the help we can get, from anyone and anywhere, to make sense of our common dilemmas.
M: True. I am reminded of an emblematic story I heard long ago about the elementary school teachers in Tucson who were training in the methods of an anthropological concept called Funds of Knowledge.¹¹ This approach, like citizen science and citizen folklore, assumed that students in the classroom were not in deficit of practical knowledge about their life conditions; in fact, while they may have lacked arithmetic or reading skills, they possessed much savvy and expertise about a range of other practical living skills. One math teacher had a particularly hard time engaging students in the class activities. In the classrooms, her students seemed utterly uninterested in math. But one day while she was observing her students interact in the playground she discovered that one kid was bringing candy from Mexico on a regular basis and was running a makeshift import business among his peers. The same students who showed no interest in math class were quite adept at keeping accounts on how many candies they ordered, owed for, borrowed, and traded—in other words, all the practical applications of addition, subtraction, and multiplication she was trying to teach. This story and the Funds of Knowledge approach, just like several other key breakthroughs in folklife educational strategies, changed the way teachers saw their students and altered the pedagogies that were used in classrooms all over the nation. Citizen science and citizen folklore are the newest versions of this imperative to recognize the worth of people’s own capacity to make sense of their worlds.

Endnotes

URLs
Citizen Science Organization: http://www.citizenscience.org
National Phenology Network: https://www.usanpn.org/usa-national-phenology-network
Southwest Folklife Alliance: https://www.southwestfolklife.org
Folk Illusions as Emic, Educational Prompt
by K. Brandon Barker

It is well established that illusions—when considered as a part of perceptual experience—facilitate learning. Visit the juvenile nonfiction section of educational books on illusions at your local library, and you will find a plethora of texts aimed at teaching youths about the wonders of perceptual oddities with titles like Now You See It—Now You Don’t, Amazing Optical Illusions, Seeing Is Believing, Awesome Optical Illusions, Cool Optical Illusions. In those books, you will find many textual performances of a well-worn, literary trope I call the Illusion-Surprise.

I begin, here, a version of the Illusion-Surprise by guiding your attention to an object on the page, like the object below (see Figure 1). Next, I ask you to question that which you perceive: “Is seeing really believing? Can you tell which of these orange circles is larger?” The next question is perfunctory: “Are you sure?” If you have some familiarity with illusion literature and especially if you are a fan of optico-geometric illusions, then it is quite likely you have seen the object in Figure 1. This is the Ebbinghaus Illusion.1 Because of the relative size of the blue circles that surround the orange circles, the orange circle on the left (the orange circle that is surrounded by larger blue circles) is seen as smaller than the orange circle on the right. See? Returning to the formula of the trope, I tell you now to take out a ruler and to measure the orange inner circles. “See?” I should ask again. “Seeing is not always believing!” And, presto, the Illusion-Surprise ends successfully as your ruler shows you that the inner circles are, in fact, the exact same size. 2

Figure 1. Which of the two orange circles is larger?
What is unclear about the Illusion-Surprise trope is whether readers—including youths and adults—are actually surprised to learn of the illusory tendencies of perception when they see an optico-geometric illusion on the page or screen. Even if you have never seen the Ebbinghaus Illusion presented above and even if you are surprised by its particular characteristics, is it the case that you have never seen (or heard, or felt) any illusion? That, I suggest, would be truly remarkable. And, when we consider the Illusion-Surprise trope alongside other cultural performances that feature perceptual illusions, we begin to realize that people, generally, are not even slightly naïve to the illusory tendencies of perception. After all, illusions that arise from natural contexts like the Waterfall Illusion and the Moon Illusion have been recognized since antiquity, and performed illusions appear frequently in a range of cultural contexts, including art, performing arts, warfare, religion, and—as we have just discussed—in a plethora of educational literature.

Herein, I want to focus on the fact that illusions also feature in children’s traditional play. Folk illusions constitute a genre of play in which performers trick their own or their playmates’ perceptual systems into perceiving an intended illusion. Obvious examples are the Rubber Pencil trick, listening for the sounds of the ocean in a conch shell, and sly aunts and uncles who steal little noses from their two- and three-year-old nieces and nephews. In studying folk illusions for the past several years, my fellow researchers and I have found that, beginning around the age of seven, youths themselves frequently know about and are eager to perform several of these kinds of illusory tricks. Including variants, we have found more than one hundred folk illusions, including illusions performed across every perceptual modality. We have gathered remembrances from 21 states in the U.S. and from a total of nine countries on four continents.

Considering folk illusions alongside the Illusion-Surprise trope, we recognize the latter to be an example of not just a worldview dominated by writing (and by extension the verbal) but also an example of adultocentrism, long considered an ethnographic pitfall in children’s folklore. The genre of folk illusions suggests that perceptual illusions already have a place in children’s worldviews, and following Paddy Bowman’s charge that educators “must gauge cultural awareness,” we should consider forms within the genre as avenues for incorporating the implicit knowledge that children and youths bring to bear on an ancient and pervasive philosophical problem—the complex relationships between mind, body, reality, and social interaction.

Folk Illusions as Classroom Activity
For the development of our catalog of folk illusions, I and my colleagues have administered surveys to college-aged students and gathered remembrances from dozens of adults. But, the most important insights of the study have come from working with middle-school students, summertime campers, Scouting participants, after-school program participants, and preschoolers in Louisiana and Indiana. The heart of these interactions has consisted of three steps: (1) showing participants a few illusions, (2) explaining some scientifically understood psycho-physical mechanisms that give rise to the illusions, and (3) asking the participants if they know any similar activities. In my experience, it is not enough simply to ask students if they know of any illusions for, unlike games, songs, and other playground activities, the category of folk illusions tends not to be represented in vernacular lexicons. Instead, it is the doing and performing of illusions that prompt dialog and interaction. What follows is a description of three folk illusions that I have successfully performed in educational settings.
Zane’s Illusion, An Optical Illusion

Each participant can perform Zane’s Illusion by (and for) herself. She should simply place the underside of her right forearm (the same side as her palm) against her nose and between her eyes. In this position, her hand will be pointed toward the ceiling, and her forearm will be perpendicular to the ground. Then, she should stare ahead while she slowly passes her left pointer finger in front of her forearm. The pointer finger will be parallel to the ground. The strange visual experience is striking for almost every participant. I recommend having the entire class perform it all at once if for no other reason than to hear a chorus of gasps and laughter.

Zane’s Illusion is named for the nine-year-old boy who originally showed us the trick in the spring of 2017. He even reported that he had come across the illusion by chance while fiddling with his fingers one boring school day. It remains an open-ended question how often visual illusions involving hands and fingers emerge as youths pass the time, but in a true instance of polygenesis, another ten-year-old boy showed us a variant of Zane’s Illusion in the winter of 2017. He, too, reported discovering the phenomenon: “I just figured it out by myself.” Of course, there is a much more widely recognized folk, optical illusion involving the hands and fingers known variably as “floating finger,” “floating sausage,” or “sausage fingers.” In a performance of Floating Finger, both tips of both pointer fingers are pointed at one another as they are held parallel to the ground in front of the performer’s face. As the performer moves the fingertips closer together, an illusory floating finger appears between the two tips of the actual pointer fingers.

Each of these visual illusions is the direct result of binocular vision. Zane’s Illusion, especially, demonstrates that two separate images—one from each eye—must be coalesced by perceptual processes of the central nervous system for us to perceive a seamless visual field. That is, the human visual system typically depends upon physiological inputs from two eyes that are separated by a distance of about 6.5 centimeters. When the forearm is placed between the eyes, it becomes an additional, artificial barrier. As the pointer finger is passed in front of that forearm/barrier, higher-order visual processes in the brain are forced to select from the disparate inputs of each eye. Such competition is known as binocular rivalry. In Zane’s case, the rivalry results in visually askew perceptions that the pointer finger is “invisible” or “foreshortened.”

The Church Bell: An Auditory Illusion

The Church Bell illusion requires a few household items, but the illusion is so powerful that the preparations are worthwhile. You will need a few metal coat hangers (hangers made completely of metal with no cardboard, wooden, or plastic rods work best), a spool of yarn or strong thread, and scissors to cut the yarn into segments approximately three to four feet in length. Next, tie the middle of one length of string to the hook of one of the hangers. Now, a performer wraps the ends of the yarn around her pointer fingers two or three times; then, those wrapped fingers are placed...
into the performer’s ears. From this position, the performer swings the hanger, banging the hanger up against a hard, metal object, such as a table, a chair, or the metal tracks beneath black- and white-boards that hold chalk and markers. The performer—and only the performer—will hear a cacophony of church bells.

We have gathered remembrances of youths performing the Church Bell at summer camps, and the activity is sometimes featured as an exhibit in children’s science museums. The folkloric quality of the illusion, however, can be confirmed as early as the 17th century. The French philosopher and physicist Jacquez Rohault mentions the trick in his Treatise on Physics (1671) as a “diversion” for children. At that time, Rohault explains, children performed the illusion using the metal tongs and the andirons of the fireplace. The activity is clearly related to other activities featuring physical vibration of a string and auditory play, such as the well-known telephone experiment, in which children use a long string and two Styrofoam cups to talk across distances. Likewise, the physical components of soundwaves commonly appear in educational introductions to auditory experiences ranging from musical harmony to sonic booms. The Church Bell demonstrates the importance of proximity between the vibrating hanger, string, finger, and the mechanisms of the inner ear.

That said, the Church Bell’s traditional name also offers an opportunity for discussion of art in everyday culture. Like the regional lexical varieties—firefly and lightning bug—that name the visual experience of a bug that flies and glows at night, “church bell” constitutes a traditional selection of an expressive metaphor. After performing the Church Bell illusion, I ask participants if other metaphors and descriptions come to mind. If “church bell” is the perfect name for this activity, I ask if we can say why. Similarly, this folk illusion provides a fresh opportunity for discussing the embodied nature of subjective vis-à-vis objective experience. I have found it rewarding to have half of a class watch the other half of the class perform Church Bell. The naïve observers get to laugh at their performing classmates’ astonished faces—not knowing or understanding why they, too, will soon be astonished by the reality of the illusion.

Falling through the Floor, a Proprioceptive Illusion
A performance of Falling through the Floor involves two participants. One participant, the experiencer of the illusion, lies face down on the floor (a soft mat or rug is helpful) with his arms stretched out above his head and with his eyes closed. The other participant holds the experiencer’s wrists and lifts the experiencer’s upper torso off the floor for about 30 seconds. At the conclusion of this 30-second lifting period, the experiencer’s arms and body are lowered very slowly back to the floor. The experiencer will feel as though he is falling through the floor.

Falling through the Floor provides an opportunity to discuss less apparent aspects of perception that go beyond the five Aristotelian senses of vision, touch, smell, hearing, and taste. Falling
through the Floor is, in fact, an illusion of proprioception, which can be defined as one’s perception of one’s own body in space. Using laboratory instruments such as mirrors, cameras, and mechanical vibrators, experimental scientists can create a multitude of proprioceptive illusions, including phantom limb(s), illusory perceptions of falling, stretching, shrinking, floating, and of bodily displacement. Interestingly, the exact causes of proprioceptive illusions remain unclear. Some scientists and philosophers suspect that neurological explanations of proprioceptive illusions will likely require an “active” rather than a “passive” understanding of perception. In this line of thinking, proprioceptive illusions involve a complex intermingling of incoming, physiological stimuli with dynamic, active brain processes that constantly rely upon past experience to perceive the present.10

In variants of this folk illusion, the experiencer’s feet are held in the air so that his legs feel as though they are falling through the floor. Verbal characterizations of the activity vary as well, describing the illusion as a sensation of “freefalling,” of “falling off a building,” and of “being buried in a grave.” The latter, more macabre description is related to other séance-like activities that feature sensations of falling or floating—the most well-known being Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board, and Floating Arms (a.k.a. “the doorframe trick”). We have gathered remembrances from college-aged students who, while growing up, performed Falling through the Floor or one of its variants from every major region of the United States. Given the unusual bodily position the illusion requires and the vulnerability inherent in the 30-second lifting period, Falling through the Floor demonstrates youths’ deep, social commitment to the intended purpose of the activity and of the genre as a whole—to perceive an illusion. Folk illusions work in educational settings precisely because children and youths know about perceptually strange, reality-testing experiences, so they are eager to have new ones.

New Folk Illusions?
Having demonstrated and performed a few folk illusions with participants and having appropriately explained some of the perceptual processes that facilitate illusory experience, I conclude every educational visit by asking the youths if they know of any other activities that create tricky, illusory perceptions. Almost always, they have some new variant or some completely new form to share. In these moments, when I learn new examples of folk illusions from students, I fully recognize the importance of seeing through the Illusion-Surprise trope and of gauging the students’ cultural awareness of the illusions. That is, by showing interest in youth’s folk illusions, educators expose our students to the underlying, co-constructed nature of social (even educational) reality.

When things have gone very well, the student-participants—now consultants—become empowered in their playful excitement. Just as the subjective quality of illusions lends itself to personal points of view, the intersubjective quality of folk illusions leads the study of illusions to
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**Endnotes**

1. The illusion takes its name from the German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus, who reportedly first discovered it. It is also alternatively referred to as Titchener Circles, for Edward Titchener, an Oxford philosopher and psychologist who first wrote about the Ebbinghaus Illusion in English.


   It is worth noting that the Illusion-Surprise trope also appears in the professional and peer-reviewed writings of psychologists, cognitive scientists, and other scientists of illusions. For previous discussions of the phenomenon in these “adult,” academic contexts, see Rice and Barker (2017, 52) as well as Barker and Rice (2018, pages tk).

3. The Waterfall Illusion is a visual, motion-aftereffect illusion that occurs after staring at a waterfall for a priming period of about one minute. When that time has passed and an individual looks, for example, at the rocks or cliffs next to the waterfall, the stationary rocks look as though they are rising upward, see Gregory ([1966] 2015, 109-12). In the Moon Illusion, the moon is reported to look larger when it is close to the horizon and smaller when it is higher in the sky. For a discussion of the history of these and other ancient illusions, see Johannsen (1971, 134-5).

4. See Barker and Rice (2012, 2016) for a more thorough introduction to folk illusions. For a complete study, see Barker and Rice (2018). For discussions of folk illusions in the contexts of science, see Rice and Barker (2017) and Martinez-Conde and Macknik (2016).

5. For a discussion of pedagogical problems resulting from adultocentrism and a comparison of adultocentrism to ethnocentrism, see Bauman (1982, 173-4).

6. See Bowman’s discussion of teaching teachers in *Through the Schoolhouse Door* (Bowman and Hamer 2011, 30-5). For Bowman, gauging the cultural awareness (as well as political orientations) of her students remains both a pragmatic and an ethical choice: “I want to honor the expertise of my students…” (32). In this overlap—where ethics guide the folklorist’s work—we recognize the shared existential roots of folklore in education and well-grounded performance theory. Perceptual illusions always arise from our interaction with our immediate ecological surroundings; to have our students learn from illusions, educators must begin in the same localized space.

7. This ten-year-old happens to be Lucas, the boy who features in the second and third videos—the Church Bell and Falling through the Floor—linked herein.


10. For a quick introduction to the philosophical stakes of active versus passive theories of perception, see Gregory (1987: 598-601). For a recent and vividly detailed summary of proprioception studies, see Proske and Gandevia (2012).

In a theoretical framework of active perception, a hypothetical explanation of Falling through the Floor’s illusory experience would look something like this: In the multitude of one’s past experiences of lying on the floor without actively moving one’s muscles to lift one’s arms, torso, or legs off the floor, one’s body remains (as a result of physiology and weight) on the floor. The brain, then, deals with the highly abnormal, kinesthetically passive position of Falling through the Floor’s lifting period by erroneously estimating the height that one’s playmate has actually lifted one’s arms and torso off of the floor. This mis-estimation combined with the slow lowering of the experiencer’s torso give rise to the illusion.

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When the Clowns Take Over the Classroom: Notes from the Circus Arts Conservatory in Sarasota, Florida
by Alison Russell

The Circus is evolving but we are at the forefront of that, allowing education to be a part of that.
—Karen Bell
Education and Outreach Manager
Circus Arts Conservatory

“Five, four, three, two, one…” A crowd of eager young faces counts down together, orchestrated by two enthusiastic clowns, Karen Bell and Robin Eurich. As they get to “one,” Bell releases the softball on a string, causing it to unwind from a medium pole in increasingly larger concentric circles, moving faster as the circles get wider. The ball hits a brightly colored block, causing a domino effect, and the whole Marvelous, Miraculous Circus Machine is set into motion.

The Marvelous, Miraculous Circus Machine is one of six structured lesson sequences that the Circus Arts Conservatory (CAC) in Sarasota, Florida, designed to use the local circus culture to improve STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics) education in nearby schools. The CAC is one of several circus troupes and academies in the city, which has a hundred-year history with this unique part of American culture. Recently, the CAC has been looking to expand engagement with the local circus culture by connecting directly with the formal school curriculum, particularly the growing educational emphasis on science and math curriculum. Led by formally trained clowns Karen Bell and Robin Eurich, the Circus Science Program has brought the tradition of the circus into classrooms, and classrooms to the circus in and around Sarasota, while teaching principles of science and engineering.

Circus Science was created, at first informally, through classroom outreach on behalf of the CAC. It started with a show for the Ringling Brothers Museum, during which a clown dressed as a professor taught the intricacies of the trapeze. Trapeze is one of the many artistic disciplines of the circus passed down through generations as part of the occupational knowledge of circus performance and tradition (Davis 2002: 21). This performance, however, was more than just the “what,” it was the “how.” The educational value of this performance sparked an idea. Teachers at Electa A. Lee Magnet Middle School in Sarasota County contacted the CAC. Rebekka Stasny, a teacher at Lee, and her team were looking for this type of curricular hook to enhance their interdisciplinary curriculum. For Stasny, the circus was a part of her life in Florida and something she and her students could share.
At Stasny’s request, Karen Bell went to Lee and the two groups developed the daylong program together for 8th graders. A partnership between social studies and science expanded as Stasny discovered this was a creative way to teach science and help students meet Florida education standards. Over the intervening years, Bell worked with Stasny and other local teachers to develop a science and arts curriculum. Five years ago, when the CAC acquired the traditional circus school Sailor Circus, Robin Eurich also came on board. As someone with both a degree in physical sciences and experience teaching at Ringling Brothers, Eurich combines the informal transmission of circus skills in a folk tradition with formal pedagogy of STEM education. Together with a recent alliance with the University of South Florida’s Partnership for Arts Integrated Teaching (PAInT), Circus Science has developed a full, standards-based curriculum that demonstrates the efficacy of place-based education and project-based learning in STEAM instruction.

One ongoing development is to take the already strong pedagogy and match it to standards and practices of the Florida school system. Bell and Eurich began to formalize their teaching in 2007 with arts integration workshops from the Kennedy Center Education Division, which taught art and theater educators how to go beyond enrichment and become a more integral part of the curriculum. Since then, they have followed the Kennedy Center Arts Integration Protocol, an approach enhanced by the partnership with PAInT. Denise Davis Cotton, the PAInT Coordinator, sees her role as adding to the rhythm and momentum of activities, partially by bringing codified arts and standards expertise to the project. The Florida Board of Education has worked to extend the focus on STEAM statewide and “strive to increase the number of students enrolled, with emphasis on students from underrepresented subpopulations as well as those who may be struggling” (Davis Cotton 2018). Davis Cotton says that they have a growing body of work that proves that this type of program helps students’ STEAM knowledge, as well as their knowledge of community circus culture, as observed through pre- and post-assessment data.

The first layer of success is in implementation. Bell compares telling kids, typically ages 8 through 13, that they are learning physics to telling them they need to eat broccoli. It is easier if you show them that it is something that can be fun and doable before you introduce the fact that it is broccoli. This is achieved partially by the connection to the circus, which is exciting to a wide range of students (Sugarman 2002), especially when connected to the circus down the street.

Bell and Stasny both say they start with a simple question like “How does a tightrope walker balance?” or “How does a trapeze artist swing into the ring?” These open-ended questions create both more possibility and more buy-in. “Kids like to think outside the box,” Stasny explains. “They learn a lot, and we learn a lot about how kids think” from posing these questions. Davis Cotton adds that it gives students ownership from the beginning of the lesson.
From there, Bell, Eurich, and the classroom teacher lead students through the experiment. The offering that most excites students is the Marvelous, Miraculous Circus Machine, the Rube Goldberg creation for which students must create at least three “cause-and-effect reactions” throughout the contraption (Bell 2017). The opening question is “How can students use Newton’s three laws of motion to create a grand circus entrance?” Students are given blocks, ramps, balls, string, and other small materials to create a version of the Machine in miniature. Once they have tried their own creations, it is time to head to the Big Top, to see it play out on a human-sized scale, making the CAC an integral part of the lesson’s implementation. Although it is possible to complete the activity in the classroom, the materials and space of the circus tent allow learning to be more authentic, occurring in the community rather than the classroom. The Big Top setting also ties the process to the physical space as well as the knowledge of the circus. Circus performers are able to be part of the action as the large Machine is set off, showing the connection between the showmanship of the visual circus display and the principles of physics that allow them to work.

Students who participate in Circus Science programs often work in teams, practicing the collaborative efforts that are essential to working circuses and increasingly recognized by pedagogical experts as 21st-Century Skills. As Stasny points out, today’s students will need those skills such as problem solving and collaboration because many jobs that students will pursue haven’t been invented yet. The improvisation of the circus is ideal for this type of learning and for Bell and Eurich’s ability to bond with the students. Elementary and middle-school students, Bell claims, are able to take more risks with the two performers in clown costumes than in a more formal setting. Both Bell and Eurich emphasize in the performance the acceptability of mistakes. In an era of rigorous testing, Circus Science emphasizes skills as well as content knowledge that promote a healthier learning environment.

That is why place-based education is so essential here as a reason to bring together science and arts education. Students are often required by the curriculum to use either their language skills or their math skills, their art skills or their science skills. Rarely is a curriculum integrated enough to do both. By combining the local culture of the circus, and the artistry involved in that tradition, with the more precise engineering of STEAM lessons, the whole brain, right and left, is engaged in learning, explains Davis Cotton. She speaks about a time when she attended a lesson and students were speaking the language of circus and science, while also enjoying the aesthetic experience of the circus performances. For her, it was an effortless opportunity to capture both sides of that experience.

Stasny sees the multiple levels of learning in the classroom as well. Early on in implementing the program she had a student who struggled with a learning disability and was largely unmotivated to participate. The creativity in the unit really excited the student about learning. He went home and built a potato launcher with his father, using some principles of physics taught by the CAC educators. When he brought it in, he was the star of the class. Stasny believes that moment was pivotal because he could show his learning in his own way, he could feel smart in his own way. Students who experience the program see that there are many different ways to approach learning, especially with physics.

Sarasota is becoming increasingly diverse, with many people who are not originally from the area entering the schools. With new populations coming in, Bell notes that they do not realize the
history of town. Part of the program is letting young people know about the place where they live, helping them take ownership of their area as well as the curriculum. Stasny feels as though many students did not understand or appreciate where they were living until the program began, tying them to their community. Sarasota is an arts-rich community, Davis Cotton explains. With Circus Science, students can optimize and create a strong sense of how it fits into American history and culture. The success of the program in Sarasota comes from its connection to the circus culture, even for those students who have never been to the circus before.

Ultimately, the largest testament to the success of this program is its growth and scope. From the collaboration with Stasny and Lee Middle School, Circus Science is now in 30 elementary and middle schools in Sarasota and Manatee County. Over 4,000 students have participated in Circus Science this year (Florida Department of Education). For those students, teachers have seen a 39- to 43-percent learning gain from the Circus Science and Marvelous Machine units based on a pre- and post-assessment of Florida STEM standards. These strides speak to the efficacy of the program in combining local history, STEM and STEAM education, and community folklife.

More importantly, students enjoy the outreach into their community. Bell mentions that students particularly like to visit at the end of the program, coming to the Big Top or the Ringling Circus Museum. They love to surprise docents with their knowledge when they see a circus artifact. Students are also able to speak knowledgeably with the CAC performers who take part in the fieldtrip experience. For example, they have an idea of just how difficult it is to gain the momentum and calculate the angle of the trapeze jump and have a greater appreciation for the effort. As Davis Cotton puts it, “they are able to speak the language.” Being the experts makes the learning more rewarding for students, particularly when they can use that knowledge in their community.

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URLs
Circus Arts Conservatory: https://circusarts.org

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When the Clowns Take Over the Classroom: Notes from the Circus Arts Conservatory in Sarasota, Florida
When families merge, they bring their stories, histories, and traditions together. This process is made especially clear as cultures and experiences mingle and collide on the family table. Cognizance of why we eat what we eat can be taught to preserve the history of the meal and shape the new narrative to be passed along as the future’s history. About two decades ago, we—Lisa Higgins and Kate Haag Rogers—joined the same family, first in courtship and later in marriage. As relationships formed and grew, we brought our own ideas about food and found that although the food was not the same our interest in it was common ground.

Our spouses are siblings, an older sister and her younger brother, who were born just north of Kansas City and moved periodically, following their father’s jobs. As they branched out, moving farther away from their roots, the Rogers family of four, our in-laws and their two children, sustained family connections with traditions, many rooted in foodways. Each time they uprooted and then resettled, the Rogers family planted a garden. When we joined them, we were drawn into this world of gardening and sharing their bounty as a matter of course. To this day, through long careers and into retirement, our family’s elders garden; they preserve, can, and freeze what they grow, and they serve these fruits of their labor. Their two-car garage serves as a modern root cellar, home to full freezers and a bank of shelves lined with rows and rows of jars: jellies, jams, vegetables, pickles, relishes, and more. These homegrown and preserved foods have found their way to the tables of their children’s families and, with them, the stories about these food traditions.

We quickly learned, usually around a dinner table, that there are family legends about the processes and products of the Rogers’ family gardens—the good, the bad, and the infamous “canned patty pan squash.” These stories, and the annual reports from the garden, serve as the basis for many communications. They are told at family gatherings and at the table with the grandchildren. These stories are the second preserving of the fruits of the elders’ labor. We, the newcomers to the family,
also came into the fold with our own family foodways from the Mid-South and Upper Midwest. We, too, came from families who moved away from our families’ roots to follow our fathers’ careers. The array of traditions has merged, emerged, and evolved in our individual homes and at our collective gatherings at holidays, birthdays, weddings, and funerals. Our stories are braided with theirs in dishes old and new.

As global and local food systems change, Kate, who works as a community educator and in ethical food advocacy, has made it her mission to teach the next generation in the family about the food they eat so that the family histories can be preserved and so the children are aware of all the people and places that are part of their nourishment. The stories that were once simple have become more complex but, in Kate’s eyes, no less important.

When the folklorist in the family, Lisa, attended a Future of American Folklore Conference in 2017 in Bloomington, Indiana, she found herself texting quotations and thoughts to Kate, the family farmer and homeschooler. In particular, during the session Applying Folkloristic Understandings of Food to Current Social Issues: Sustainability, Social Equity, and Diversity, panelist Lucy Long shared a graphic from Foodways Traditions of Northwest Ohio called the Tree of Connections. In the graphic of a tree, Long grounds her theory of food traditions in soil, roots, trunk, and branches—the past, present, place, and people (Figure 1).

In essence, we sisters-in-law found the Tree of Connections resonated not only
with our experiences in the Rogers family and in our families of origin but also in Kate’s food advocacy work. We began to correspond via email and text, and we set up a Google Drive folder to “free write” about our family foodways. Lisa shared a foodways lesson from the Missouri Folk Arts Program’s *Show-Me Traditions: An Educators’ Guide to Teaching Folk Arts and Folklife in Missouri Schools*, which led to several paragraphs from each about family recipes and gardens. From the Foodways Vocabulary Worksheet (See pg. 62), we extemporized about the food we grew up eating—and avoiding: Kate holds dear childhood memories of kolaches, bratwurst, kraut, and pierogi. Lisa’s family loves chocolate gravy over biscuits, turkey with cornbread dressing, black-eyed peas, and pink fluff Jell-O “salad.” Kate’s family ate handmade Bohemian breads from Vesecky’s Bakery in Berwyn, Illinois. Lisa’s family ate Wonder Bread and Hostess cakes straight off the truck after her father finished his route. Kate’s great-grandparents owned an urban butcher shop down the street from the bakery. Lisa’s great-grandparents butchered hogs in the winter on their farms in rural Arkansas.

From the vocabulary worksheet, we shifted our discussion to stories about recipes. Prized recipes. Family cookbooks. Great-grandma Daisy Belle’s secret mustard recipe. Our mother-in-law’s pumpkin pie squares. Kate’s nondairy revision of the pumpkin squares. Lisa’s mother’s Thanksgiving cornbread dressing recipe, and Lisa’s gluten-free revision of the dressing. In fact, we spend a lot of time thinking, texting, and sometimes talking about revisions to make recipes nondairy and gluten-free—especially before one of our bountiful, but rare, family meals when we can gather together in Georgia or Missouri. Allergens and vegetarianism are

**Figure 2.** Our mother-in-law bakes pumpkin pie squares for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Her preferred recipe from the *Farm Journal’s Complete Home Baking Book* is well-worn and stained and includes her notes for adjusting servings.

*Photo by Lisa L. Higgins.*

**Figure 3.** Kate included our mother-in-law’s pumpkin pie square recipe in a family cookbook. Kate has made notes to make the recipe dairy-free for her children.

*Photo by Kate Haag Rogers.*
two key reasons that Kate’s family garden grew into a hobby farm. A holistic education is another reason (Figures 2 and 3, Pumpkin Squares Recipes).

Kate, her husband, and their two children—affecti onately called “Melon” and “Puck”—have lived in rural Southeast Georgia since the spring of 2011. Like the previous generation, this family has moved often to follow a career. Like the previous generation, this one resettles in new locations by tilling and planting gardens: “We move a lot. Getting adjusted to a new community, especially in rural areas, means adjusting to the local food culture.” In Georgia, Kate and family went a giant step beyond, working years to amend the soil and establish a hobby farm with chickens, guineas, and horses. They started a CSA program (community supported agriculture), and Kate is very active in the local homestead guild and its weekly summer market.

In 2015, she started blogging at *Katy Had a Little Farm* and describes herself as:

> An ethical food advocate, writer, and community educator, I am also a wife, mother, volunteer and friend. Formally educated at a large Midwestern university, but an obsessive autodidact, I walked away from conventional agriculture and politics to devote myself to the health of my family and community.

> My goal is to reduce the toxic load on our bodies, help people become cognizant eaters, and support an ethical food system. Clean food and real food are the focus of this paradigm shift.

Over the last seven years in rural Southeast Georgia, these two transplanted Midwesterners have nurtured their family and their farm side by side. Our families keep in touch with occasional visits, frequent phone calls, texts, Facebook, and Kate’s blog. *Katy Had a Little Farm* is where our family learns more than we might otherwise about her pedagogy of the farm. Lisa, as a folklorist, is particularly curious and asks questions about the ways that Kate and family, outsiders to the region, established their place in the local community so firmly. She responded:

> When we moved to the Southeast, we were really excited about all the things we could grow here that we’d never been able to grow elsewhere. We planted citrus trees, pomegranates, figs, and peanuts before our boxes were unpacked. We soon learned few people were still eating these local fruits. While we waited for our own plants to produce, we were able to glean from prolific plants that no one else wanted.

> As we got used to the local restaurants and grocery stores, we were surprised that the food we associated with the region seemed largely absent, with the exceptions of sweet tea and instant grits. The drive-throughs were full, and the few local restaurants were serving the same fare one could find off any Interstate. What had happened to the southern fare we anticipated? Was this all that was left of southern food?

> Through gardening and networking, we started getting a feel for the area, both our piece of land and the local culture. We stopped and talked to other gardeners, we
started a CSA garden from our farm, and we started learning about the region’s food from people who remembered when it was made at home, collecting stories of what grandmothers served and children foraged before convenience ruled. We just had to peel back the recent layer until we got to food with meaning.

As the waiting list for our small CSA grew, so, too, did our food-based community. Slowly, the food on our table started to include stewed local greens, shrimp and fish from the closest coasts, heirloom grits, more okra, and Scotch bonnets. We grew an old variety of peanut and chewed sugarcane while we attended our first cane boil. Our table was growing to include our new community.

A group of us—eaters, farmers, teachers, and chefs—became a guild affiliated with our regional Okefenokee Heritage Center with the goals of promoting local food and supporting local farmers and artisans. We started a producer-only, local fare market that is going into its fourth year. Then we added an annual farm-to-fork meal and a homesteading conference. We offer local producers a place to sell their food, not just at the market but also through a co-op program. We provide volunteers and help with school gardens, work to bring local food into school lunchrooms, and host classes about food production and cooking. We partner with Saint Andrew’s Society to glean fields and give away the food. We work with another community organization to teach food-insecure families how to prepare the foods they can get locally and seasonally so they can get the most quality and quantity from their resources.

These relationships between community members, local chefs, and farmers have helped revive the foods of the region and, by doing so, created common ground for people who otherwise may never have bonded. At our market, Chef Andy, billed as the Pop-Up Chef, takes anything the farmers are selling that day and turns it into samples. He teaches shoppers simple ways to use the products of the soil from our own area. Then, the farmers sell out of the products they brought that day.

There are no instant grits at the market. There are blue, white, and yellow grits, but no instant. I know how to make them now. There are no eggs from a windowless egg factory. Instead, there are eggs from a local farmer who knows most of her hundred hens by name and packs their eggs, four colors to a dozen, so customers smile when they open the carton. Market customers can enjoy these eggs with the sausage from her hogs, the biscuits her husband, another chef, makes, and the goat cheese from our local pastured dairy. Who needs a drive-through?

The market’s produce farmers are there to tell how to stew greens or which tomatoes to use on a tomato and mayo sandwich. They can share the stories of how okra may have been transported by African slaves to the region and explain why the onions of this area are so outstanding. Folks can take home a bag of local shrimp from the people who caught it, and a mess of BBQ. Ours is a community built around passion and curiosity, and a community that never could have happened in a grocer or drive-through.
We insisted on eating this place, and it turned out we weren’t the only ones who wanted to do that. In the summer, we forage for blackberries, figs, and loquats. In the fall, we glean pecans while many locals hunt for wild boar to make into sausage. There is a truck that parks in the same spot every year to sell green boiled peanuts on the side of the road. Another sells watermelons in the summer and turnips in the fall. We chew cane on the porch in the hot fall air and go to cane boils when it cools off. People are still doing these things. No one could see them from the drive-through. Since the rise of this local food movement, the number of people gardening has grown exponentially. The message resonates.

In addition to her curiosity about how the family found common ground as newcomers to the community, Lisa, always wearing her folklorist hat, was intrigued by Melon and Puck’s homeschool education, which is so different from her own. Lisa has spent decades in the study of folklore as a student, scholar, and arts administrator. Overall, she credits those roles, where she met and formed relationships with an array of tradition bearers, as educational and catalysts for personal understanding, including with foodways.

Among my family and long-time friends, it has mostly been a given that I am (or was) a very picky eater. I was the stubborn child often left to sit at the supper table while my glass of milk grew warm and my dinner grew cold. My parents didn’t operate as short-order cooks or cater to my limited palate, but they did allow me to fend for myself, as a loaf of enriched “white” bread and a jar of peanut butter were always in our cabinets. Often when I reflect on Thanksgiving meals, as many U.S. folklorists do with students and workshop participants, I recall that my grandmothers’ tables were overflowing with bounties of roasted meat, vegetables, casseroles, and desserts. My plate was sad and fairly empty, usually only slices of ham and whipped potatoes, which I ate to have my share of cookies and pie (filling only—no crust). The maturity of my palate was so delayed that I can vividly recall when I first tried many foods, especially vegetables.

While both my grandmothers were avid gardeners, in my nuclear childhood family we had no gardens. We adopted convenience foods readily, although my mother, a huge fan of vegetables, usually had a family connection to supply her with squash, tomatoes, peas, and okra. She was a fan of u-pick fruit farms, and she often took us to strawberry patches to gather all we could. My paternal grandmother had a vast vegetable garden that stretched across the southern edges of three backyards. Gardening was a necessity all her life, even when she moved herself and six children into town. My maternal grandmother, too, gardened and cooked from her harvests. Today when I am digging in dirt it is almost always to tend to flower beds and pots, filled with striped petunias, irises, peonies, and hydrangeas. I have been in search of my mothers’ flower gardens more than their vegetable gardens.

Working as a folklorist, too, expanded my palate. In the field, it is a cardinal rule to accept graciously what tradition bearers offer during site visits and other occasions. In the mid-1990s, I worked as a graduate assistant and accompanied
Dana Everts-Boehm, then director of the Missouri Folk Arts Program, to document an apprenticeship between a master maker of low-rider cars and his apprentice in a predominantly LatinX region of Kansas City. We spent time in the family’s garage, and in the kitchen, where we observed firsthand the making of traditional Mexican favorite dishes, most of which I had never eaten before and never would have tried of my own accord. Not only did I sample every dish, I took home a sampling of desserts to share with my housemates. Simultaneously, at the University of Missouri, I was also teaching or co-teaching Introduction to Folklore and Women and Folklore, courses in which foodways were always prominent in the syllabus. Foodways proved especially vivid means to illustrate to college students how diverse their traditions were, even if they initially thought their traditions were homogenous. Years later, as the director of the Missouri Folk Arts Program, I knew it was imperative that we include a foodways chapter in our elementary school educators’ guide.

After years within the Rogers family, my circle of gardening friends, and as a folklorist, I can see that my plate is fuller and more colorful. I find myself taking home yellow squash, zucchini, and okra from the in-laws’ garden and cooking them on autopilot. I can almost somatically recall how my mom and grandmothers cooked. Before law school, my spouse worked in two cooperative grocery stores—one in Minneapolis and the other in Atlanta—two more occasions when I learned about more ethical food sources and to eat a bit less conservatively. At my house today, we typically only grow a handful of tomato plants and some herbs; however, we strive to shop as often as possible at farmers’ markets and two independent grocers that support regional farmers. Our household commitment to foodways has shifted, as we also support organizations like the Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture, especially in their mission to provide fresh, local food in spaces and for people who have little access. I want our neighbors across our small city to have opportunities like Melon and Puck—to sow, plant, harvest, and eat better food.

An ever-curious folklorist and evolving foodie, Lisa recognized, simply based on photographs posted on social media and texts, that Kate and family immersed themselves in curricula infused with farming and vice versa, at home and in their new community. Currently ten and eight years old, Melon and Puck spend a lot of time with their parents tending the farm, amending soil, weeding, planting, picking, gathering, and more. The whole family is regularly covered in dirt, whether a fine layer of dust or smudges of mud. The children are frequently photographed holding freshly picked vegetables or making a simple meal with the harvest. For visitors to the farm, Melon and Puck are capable, thorough, and accurate as they give tours of their fields, their poultry yard, and their horse barn.

Inside the house, Melon and Puck have their own desks and a computer station where they complete more conventional morning lessons, but Kate truly immerses their lessons in their everyday lives, and their everyday lives revolve around their land and its bounty.

The gardens naturally incorporate themselves into the learning of kids who get to work in them, but I intentionally use the gardens on a regular basis.
The land was actually so integral to our lives, from our routines to their schooling, that I don’t even know where to bite this elephant: The garden is more than just science class, catching bugs, shaking soil in jars to make the types separate, slicing stuff to put under the microscope, identifying plants, etc. The soil and the tending of the plants are part of the story of the food that is put on the table or shared with friends.

So, let me go back to our farm here [in Georgia], the food we grow, and the way we have used that as a teaching tool. We teach that we are part of a whole. The treatment/stewardship of the smallest elements, microbiome (soil, human, etc.), water, air, matter to the whole. We teach this literally by teaching ecology, but also in ethics and even sociology. Life cycles, nutrient cycles, basic responsibility . . . there is so much.

We have used our sales and the market to teach the kids about economics and value. Melon [nine years old at the time] and her two friends had a homemade dog treat business for the 2017 market season. They had to fill out paperwork, save receipts, find recipes, source ingredients, schedule time to make them all, worry about storage, price it all to make money, deal with customers, and manage all the finances.

We also tackle issues like slavery and forced labor in the supply chain, labeling, and ethical sourcing certifications.

We use food to teach culture. It is easy when it is another culture, far away, and with deep food roots, but we also teach about locality and seasonality, shaping what is traditional here. Local food culture is less obvious with our current supply chain and the transformation of food with the introduction of convenience foods, but the prevalence of okra, citrus, and po’ boys still speaks to regional specialty.

The kids know how to forage in our area. They know about climate change and regional adaptation. This all informs their growing political awareness.

Conversations around the table are often heuristic, a series of questions that encourage the children to apply the knowledge they have acquired in their own backyard, at the market, and in community with other homesteading families. Books and the Internet are appropriate resources. Kate notes that Georgia Organics is a rich resource, often a first stop when she is looking for curriculum,
lesson plans, and activities. The site has a dedicated page for PreK–12 education resources, with videos, guides, and links to funding opportunities. Kate’s family is full of voracious readers, and they often read together, finding the children like Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: Young Readers Edition*. Pollan’s website is also a resource, with FAQs and useful links. Kate, family, and the homestead guild use both sites in their local public schools and broader community food efforts.

This focus on food education and advocacy helps the children (and our whole extended family) to see the world through narratives of interconnectedness and inclusion. Our “tree of connections” grows taller, deeper, but sometimes withers. Our individual and family tables have shifted, waxing and waning over the years. New places and soils have been incorporated; new family and friends have been made. Diets have been tailored, the food system has morphed, and locations have been added. Our stories remain a critical focal point. With each dish, each variety, the narrative expands, and the opportunities for educating the next generation grow. We recognize, accept, and often relish the dynamism of our family traditions.

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Endnotes
1. At Kate and her husband’s wedding reception, our in-laws pulled the couple aside and handed them a recipe for the family’s mustard, a deeply held secret. Our spouses’ great-grandmother, Daisy Belle (1901-1978), owned and operated restaurants in Hamilton and Kingston, Missouri, where a menu favorite was ham sandwiches with the homemade spicy mustard. Puck knows that when he and his sister achieve similar milestones, like their father and their aunt, someone in the family will pull them aside and entrust them with the recipe and its story.

URLS
https://katyhadalittlefarm.com
https://columbiaurbanag.org
https://georgiaorganics.org
The vocabulary words below can be defined in many ways. Some families eat “supper” at night; others eat “dinner.” In some cultures, an orange or piece of fruit is dessert; in other cultures, dessert is something made from a recipe with more than one ingredient. In Asia or in Asian-American families, breakfast might include soup or fish. Ask your family to help you define each of these words. Then compare your definitions with someone in your class. There are no right or wrong definitions because different people can define each of these in different ways depending on their family history and culture.

A **meal** includes: ____________________________________

### Breakfast
- **What time of day?** ________________
- **What kinds of foods?** ____________________________
- **Where is it eaten?** ____________________________

### Lunch
- **What time of day?** ________________
- **What kinds of foods?** ____________________________
- **Where is it eaten?** ____________________________

### Dinner or Supper
- **What time of day?** ________________
- **What kinds of foods?** ____________________________
- **Where is it eaten?** ____________________________

### Dessert or Snacks
- **What time of day?** ________________
- **What kinds of foods?** ____________________________
- **Where is it eaten?** ____________________________
Activity: Food Stories
Social Studies
Developed by Kate Haag Rogers

Dinner Table Conversation. I like to take a component of our meal and trace it all the way back to its origin. Take a slice of bread. It was not just conjured from nothing by our neighbors Irvin or Amanda. The grains existed before they deftly coached them into bread.

- What kind of grains are used?
- Is it Spelt or Emmer or something else?
- Where does this grain come from?
- What methods are/could have been used by the farmer who grew it?
- What kind of soil and climate does it like?
- Is it a candidate for perennial grain production?
- Was it rescued from extinction?
- What cultures have eaten it before ours?
- What other ways has this variety been used?
- What would you like to do with it?
- How does it taste compared to the last bread you ate?

Next, let’s do a vegetable, one from the grocer.

- What kind of tomato is this?
- Where was it grown? Peru? Georgia? How far away is that?
- How was it grown? Does it say “hot house” or “vine ripened”?
- How might this have been harvested? By machine or human labor?
- Was there packaging that had to be disposed of because of this purchase?
- Is this tomato conventionally grown or organically certified?
- How is the taste? Flat? Sweet? Acidic? Watery?
- How is the texture? Is it tender or firm? Does it seem like styrofoam?
- What considerations do you think brought this variety to market?
- How does this compare to other tomatoes you’ve had?

What about entire dishes? Do you still tell the stories of the food you make? Do you look them up if they are not your stories? That is how you become a part of the food’s story. Do not ever be satisfied with the answer that something being Grandma’s dish. Why was it Grandma’s dish? Did she love it? Did someone else? Was it a reflection of her social class, her financial situation, her skill level, her culture, or ethnicity? Did she get the recipe from a cookbook or from her neighbor? Was it her grandmother’s?

You may search the internet for answers, but you can earn a 10% bonus for talking to a human for at least one of your answers.
With a growing awareness of the benefits of a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, mathematics) educational approach in academia, folklorists are reframing their work to contribute to interdisciplinary endeavors. While institutions may not fully understand the value of the arts and humanities, students continue to be interested in those pursuits and programs, which investigate the complex relationship of culture, environment, and scientific inquiry. Academia is unlikely to see much growth and development in new folklore programs, but interdisciplinary collaborations can help solidify folklorists’ place on campus, making them indispensable to their institutions and more competitive on the academic market.

Whether we are considered worthy collaborators or unwelcome intruders often depends upon specific projects and the disciplines involved. Philosophically, folklore studies in particular and the arts and humanities in general, should and do influence the understanding and application of STEM (science, technology engineering, mathematics) pursuits. Practically, however, in the current higher-education environment, influentially and financially speaking, STEM does not require the arts. Like our colleagues from the arts and humanities, at many institutions, folklorists are struggling against academia’s current, hoping the fuller implementation of a STEAM-oriented approach can provide a lifebuoy for the sustainability of our discipline on our campuses.

In their 2013 essay, “Edgework and Boundary Crossings,” Mary Hufford and Betsy Taylor make a strong case for the value of the growing field of public ecology, which they define as, “an interdisciplinary, multisectoral approach to the study and management of complex socio-
ecological systems” (100). Bridging the divide between academia and society in order to forge new public and environmental policy which recognizes and values the perspectives of multiple stakeholders is key to such collaboration. The creation of an open and ongoing dialogue between scientists, government officials, forest practitioners and the general public, an approach some have referred to as “participatory development,” is crucial when the common goal is sustainability that promotes community well-being; allowing for the successful integration of economy, ecology and society.

By using our ethnographic skills to document and analyze local knowledge in context, folklorists can play an important role in this undertaking, demonstrating the merit of a STEAM-based approach. But a number of different disciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches currently embrace seemingly similar goals. While the pursuit of collaboration that recasts our work, potentially increasing our worth and visibility in the academic sector, is a worthy endeavor, we should be cautious in our approach. Contributing to these types of projects and programs does not require folklorists to reinvent themselves and take on new academic identities. The best collaboration allows us to draw deeply from the well of folklore studies.

This essay focuses on my experiences integrating folklore studies into my university’s major in ethnobotany and minor in sustainability studies. Although both programs provide an opportunity to demonstrate the value of folklore’s disciplinary leanings, my involvement in the ethnobotany program, with its narrow epistemological approach, left me questioning the merit of my discipline in that context. My experiences in sustainability studies, however, which prioritizes a more holistic approach dependent on strong transdisciplinary collaboration, renewed my appreciation for folkloric studies and the contributions folklorists bring to the table when engaging in research with the sciences. In the process of realizing both successes and failures in my undertakings, I have learned that when embarking on the sometimes turbulent waters of interdisciplinary collaboration with the sciences, for a folklorist, folklore studies must always guide one’s navigational course. My own attempts at collaboration have been most successful when the folkloristic lens provides my focus. My efforts falter when I allow STEM-leaning disciplines to overshadow my skillset and expertise. Moreover, I have found that projects allowing for a broader approach to understanding the intricate connections between culture, environment, and economy fare better than niche projects concentrating on narrow aspects of inquiry.

Over the past several years, my institution, Frostburg State University (FSU), has embraced STEM education. Programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics have received the lion’s share of programming funds, fulltime faculty positions, and support for student work study, while programs in the humanities languish and departments in the social sciences are pressured to prove their merit by demonstrating their efficiency, measured by faculty-to-student ratios and faculty course loads. In my 14 years there, the University has faced a series of unrelenting financial crises as administrators struggle to attract and retain students to our regional institution in one of the most impoverished counties of Maryland.

According to administrators, an emphasis on STEM education serves the dual purpose of attracting students while offering training and resources beneficial to the economic development of the
regional community. A quick internal search of STEM education on FSU’s website netted 236 hits. In the past decade every new academic program in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, including the expansion of graduate studies, has been tied directly to STEM endeavors.

The allure of STEAM—Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics—has been slower to catch on. Another recent website search yielded few results. Significantly, one was in the context of notes from the Alumni Association’s board of directors meeting. Here they asked how the University could convince alumni that they valued the diversity of the arts and were committed to retaining those programs, while acknowledging that the arts were no longer seen as central to the University’s mission. Acknowledging that shift is noteworthy given the University’s historical identity as a liberal arts institution.

Certainly, my college’s infatuation with STEM education is not unique. Humanities programs around the nation are currently imperiled, and once distinctive disciplinary-centered programs in the social sciences have merged with other programs. At my institution, Mass Communication recently merged with Communication Studies, which emphasizes technology, and similar junctures are under consideration. Faculty morale has plummeted and academic departments outside the typical STEM spectrum are scrambling to reinvent themselves and forge new interdisciplinary connections with STEM departments and colleagues. Subtly shifting universities from STEM toward STEAM has become a mission of self-preservation for many. Whether those collaborations are welcomed or discouraged depends upon many factors.

From its inception, my career path at FSU has focused on finding points of connection between folklore and the sciences. In 2004, Maryland Traditions, at that time a collaborative effort between the Maryland State Arts Council and the Maryland Historical Trust under the direction of Rory Turner and Elaine Eff, partnered with FSU to create a contractual position for a folklorist. In the year prior, FSU committed to creating a program in ethnobotany—the study of people and plants. That program’s director was housed in the biology department, but the major was intended to be an interdisciplinary undertaking involving faculty from biology, chemistry, and geography. FSU was keen on creating an ethnobotany program that developed opportunities in western Maryland, and the dean, provost, and president at the time recognized the value of emphasizing place-based ethnobotany in Appalachia. They believed a folklorist could address the cultural component central to ethnobotany’s mission. Because ethnobotany itself is a hybrid between botany and anthropology, the development of an undergraduate degree in the absence of cultural specialists was perhaps untenable from the outset. My own course offerings in folklore and anthropology would become central to the new degree program.

In tandem with our efforts to build the ethnobotany program, FSU was also partnering with other organizations, including West Virginia University, the University of Maryland-College Park, and the Tai Sophia Institute to create an Appalachian Center for Ethnobotanical Studies (ACES), and funding was flowing in. Our then U.S Senator, Barbara Mikulski or her representatives, attended several meetings and committed ample funding to the University for the Center’s establishment. Mikulski hoped our efforts would culminate in an herbal processing facility in western Maryland, bringing new jobs to the region.
I was invited to those planning meetings, where I rubbed shoulders with chemists, botanists, geologists, and pharmacologists. Laboratory science was strongly represented, and at most of our gatherings, I was the lone outlier. Early on, however, my contributions were respected and appreciated. For ethnobotany to thrive at FSU it needed to embrace a cultural component, and my ability to engage community members and document the work of local herbalists was seen as an asset. My own education grew as my role in the program deepened. I helped organize the first ACES symposium, creating a keynote session highlighting a roundtable discussion by regional herbalists and featuring Orville Hicks of North Carolina as the evening’s entertainment. A master storyteller from a family of storytellers, Hicks regaled us with stories in which plants were some of the main characters. At another gathering, we welcomed the folklorist Mary Hufford as our featured speaker, and she introduced the cultural concept of the seasonal round.

Ethnobotany students were required to take my courses in cultural anthropology and folklore. Their enthusiasm provided the impetus needed to develop the classes Sociology of the Environment and Shamanism, Magic, and Folk Healing. As I transitioned from contractual to tenure track, with a home in the Sociology Department, I was encouraged to create a minor in cultural anthropology, which many ethnobotany students pursued, given the overlap in requirements.

Ten years ago, STEM had yet to become cliché and STEAM was not in the offing, but that was what we were endeavoring to accomplish through our collaboration. There was great potential in the project, however, the strain of being the only faculty member on the planning committee to represent a strictly cultural component began to weigh heavily. Time and again, I found myself a solo voice representing cultural and artistic components, surrounded by what seemed like a sea of individuals from the sciences, who spoke a language I struggled to understand. As those discussions turned to the chemical analysis of black cohosh and the economic possibilities of growing and harvesting it, I felt increasingly sidelined and overwhelmed. Being a lone wolf, representing both the humanities and social sciences was draining. My increasing marginalization grew when a new director, with a background in economic botany, joined the faculty.

I continued to offer my classes, and ethnobotany students continued to take them, but I felt that I lacked the background needed to build bridges between cultural studies and the botanical sciences. I could provide an understanding of culture in general terms, but I was deficient in the specific Classroom Connection: The Seasonal Round
Classrooms moving through the school year will also be moving through a seasonal round. In addition to holidays and special events, seasonal changes affect our work, recreation, foodways, beliefs, customs, even our worldviews. Students see how seasons change the landscape, but they may not have considered how other aspects of their lives and the life of their community change according to the season.

knowledge and vocabulary necessary for the exploration of such a narrowly defined focus. As the ethnobotany program developed, biology took a more prominent role. Geography courses were excised, and several courses I taught were removed from the core requirements and featured only as electives. I was left feeling that to contribute to the ethnobotany major, my expertise and understanding had to expand well beyond my own discipline, perhaps even at the cost of my disciplinary identity. In 2011, ACES hosted a symposium in collaboration with John Hopkins University. By that time, the distance between my interests and the ethnobotany program had diverged so greatly that I was not invited to the event. Soon after, ACES took a hiatus.

A few years ago, the ethnobotany program had an official review with an ethnobotanist, with a background in anthropology, as the outside reviewer. His strongly worded recommendation advised the program to expand the cultural component. Reacting to that criticism, together the Sociology and Biology Departments submitted a request for a joint tenure track position for someone who would contribute cultural anthropology courses to the minor and offer courses geared more specifically toward ethnobotany. That request was denied. Since then, ethnobotany has become more fully aligned with the Biology Department and shifted closer to a curriculum in economic botany. Yet, its most recent review rendered similar results. The students interviewed said they wanted more, not fewer, courses featuring culture.

It has been seven years since I was actively engaged in attending ethnobotany planning meetings. In that time, I have had an opportunity to reflect on my experience. Why did a program so rich in collaborative potential shift toward a narrower focus resulting in the exclusion of interdisciplinary scholarship? What could I have done to improve the situation? In retrospect, I should have recognized the value that my disciplinary leanings brought to the table and been less intimidated by the sciences. I should have worked more closely with the ethnobotany program to develop research opportunities that drew equally from cultural and botanical perspectives—understanding that I did not need to provide a bridge to ethnobotany myself, but that collaboration would have been the bridge. Most importantly, I should have reached out to others on campus in the arts and humanities to foster more interest in and support for the ethnobotany program to ensure that the loss of one individual did not mean that STEAM reverted to STEM.

Those lessons have served my university well in other collaborations on campus. In large part due to my growing interest in environmental activism, nurtured by my work in ethnobotany, I have sought out others engaged in investigating the overlap between environment and culture. Collectively, those efforts culminated in the establishment of an interdisciplinary minor in sustainability studies. Anticipating a significant expansion of professions related to sustainability studies, in the past two years there has been some deliberate discussion of the creation of a major in the field—with the University hopeful that a new program might attract an additional stream of students.

On our Sustainability Steering Committee, the social sciences and humanities are as strongly represented as the sciences. Since its inception, faculty from history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and English have contributed equally to lively discussions with faculty from biology, geography, chemistry, and engineering. Students are given some latitude in their selection of courses, but cultural and scientific components are equally represented and required. Although we have developed a new introductory course in sustainability studies and a capstone senior seminar,
both of which take an interdisciplinary approach, the rest of the courses supporting the minor were all previously listed in the course catalogue. It was simply a matter of seeking out the instructors from those courses and discussing how those courses could be retooled or updated to address issues of sustainability. In true STEAM fashion, the art department has also contributed by offering exhibits and workshops in recycled and found materials art.

Essentially, our efforts have been successful not because contributing faculty feel forced to develop an expertise in a new discipline, but instead because each of us is encouraged to ask how our own disciplines can contribute to an interdisciplinary understanding of the nexus of culture, environment, and economy. Our participation in this minor prompts us to engage more deeply with our own disciplines and to be more reflective about what those disciplines offer to the burgeoning field of sustainability studies. The same can be said for our students, who pair a sustainability studies minor with a vast array of majors, allowing the knowledge and experience gained in the minor to resonate with their knowledge of their major, particularly in the applied realm.

My participation in sustainability studies has prompted me to become more intentional in my course content. My Folklore in Appalachia course takes on themes of cultural sustainability while also highlighting examples of folklore that directly address human relationships to the natural world. We look at occupational lore historically associated with the logging operations, feature a local oral history collection on coal mining, and study songs and ballads from the mines and labor movement. My students learn about the chestnut blight and watch a documentary that addresses how the blight affected folkways and cultural sustainability in Appalachia. Class research—projects of the Appalachian Teaching Project administered through a partnership between East Tennessee State University and the Appalachian Regional Commission—have included documenting local foodways and agricultural practices, working with the organization Home Ground to document outdoor recreation traditions, working with regional residents and classes from a local elementary school to create a community quilt depicting sense of place themes, and teaming up with a watershed association to engage in a listening project recording attitudes about fracking (unconventional natural gas drilling).

Sociology students in Folklore in Appalachia, Fall 2016.
In my cultural anthropology course, an introductory level class, cultural sustainability has become an overriding theme. Arguably, that theme should be central to any class in cultural anthropology, but the inclusion of the course in the requirements of the sustainability minor has pushed me to connect topics and themes more meaningfully. For instance, in that class we examine ways of making a living, framing discussion with an exploration of globalization and its influence on cultural change by sharing examples of the tension that can arise when one mode of production directly interferes with another, such as the violent clashes between herders and farmers in Niger or horticultural and foraging cultures finding their previous ways of life unsustainable due to the encroachment and expansion of the palm oil industry and resulting deforestation. We connect those themes to modes of consumption, acknowledging the global reach of our own consumption habits and their impact on cultures worldwide. That material augments earlier discussions of environmental racism. Toward the end of the course, we look at examples of social movements and protests by people struggling to protect the natural landscape and their right to remain there. Issues of climate change, climate refugees, the Dakota Access Pipeline Protest, and activists working to stop the development of a series of dams in the Amazon become topics of discussion. We also look at the folklore and artistic creations that help to galvanize people to action—song, costume, narrative, material culture, performance, and more.

Being pushed beyond my comfort zone has led me to develop new research interests and pursue collegial relationships with faculty across disciplinary lines. Although I remain the only folklorist, and even the only cultural anthropologist, on campus, I am surrounded by colleagues who have similar goals and motivations despite our different backgrounds. In my time at FSU I have become a model of interdisciplinary scholarship, and I have realized that I cannot do it alone. The work of a single individual cannot successfully turn STEM to STEAM; meaningful collaboration is key to the transition. The best collaboration allows us to deepen our relationship with our own discipline, allowing our expertise to anchor our role in inquiry and discussion.

If and as higher education moves away from conventional disciplinary leanings and continues the trend toward devaluing the humanities and liberal arts, a concerted effort by individuals engaged in humanities and social sciences across the board will be needed to advocate for the value of our knowledge and experience. Collectively, we must reach across disciplinary lines to demonstrate that STEM needs the arts and humanities as much as we need STEM.

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Endnote
1. The minutes from this meeting read: “How do we reassure people that we will have diversity; STEAM (incorporating Arts into STEM) not giving up on areas of the University, but understanding that we are not going to be enhancing those areas because it is not our focus” (AABOD Minutes 10.23.16).

Work Cited
In spring 2015, part way through my first year of public folklore graduate study at Western Kentucky University, I approached Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA) Education Program Director Renee Hunt fresh on the heels of attending my first OEFFA conference in Granville, Ohio. Breathlessly, I asked whether OEFFA had ever thought about doing an oral history project. I had been documenting sustainable agricultures in Western and South Central Kentucky for the past five months as part of my graduate study, but I was yearning to trace this history as it played out in my own Ohio, where the burgeoning organic farming movement deeply shaped my childhood sense of the interconnections between food, environment, and health. Indeed, Renee replied, OEFFA had dreamed of gathering their history, and for quite some time. From that conversation, and a whole lot of magic from co-conspirators statewide, our project—Growing Right: Ecological Farming in Ohio, 1970s–Now—was born.

With funding from Ohio Humanities, the Greater Columbus Arts Council, and the Puffin West Foundation, Growing Right has conducted 50-plus interviews with farmers, growers, and activists across the state. Moreover, in summer 2017, the project launched 16 pop-up exhibits at farmers’ markets, grocery stores, and health-conscious food venues across Central Ohio. In September 2017, as an unexpected wrap-up to our tour series, we were accepted to exhibit at Farm Aid, held that year in Burgettsville, Pennsylvania.

About the Photos: Designer Jeremy Purser’s fieldwork photography-inspired postcards advertised Growing Right’s Summer 2017 farmers’ market pop-up tour and multimedia website.
Our project’s documentation methods strove toward an ecological method for public environmental folklife work. We followed in the spirit of folklorists attuned to material culture and vernacular architecture, such as Michael Ann Williams,1 John Dorst, John Vlach, and others, as well as pioneering environmental folklife study projects like Mary Hufford’s Pinelands Folklife Project and the Coal River and New River Gorge projects.2 Growing Right has spent two summers visiting the farms, groceries, and places of Ohio’s organic movement. We documented oral histories and verbal memories of practitioners’ lives in the movement and their synchronicity with their places and ecologies. Thus, we produced a much broader, multimedia fieldwork kit than is standard in oral history practice: hours-long oral history recordings, yes, but also thousands of fieldwork and object photographs, walking interviews, and media-rich farm tours. In our second fieldwork summer, we added acoustic ecology ambient environmental sound recordings, video shorts, and experimental 16mm film. Our fieldwork method has blessed us with a plentitude of documentation and the question: How do we re-associate these multiple forms of documentation of place, off the many farms and locations where this movement happened, to help communicate the broader story of why and how organic farming grew in Ohio?

Growing Right has provided a unique opportunity to mobilize folklife, oral history, and public history documentation methods and forms of public engagement and presentation to share the story of Ohio organics. It has also offered the rare opportunity to develop a truly public-facing popular pedagogy around materials folklorists usually traffic in: oral history, soundscape recordings, walking and working interviews, film and video, and fieldwork photography. Although the field of public folklore has cultivated public programming for venues as diverse as public libraries, narrative stages, and audio/mobile tours for decades,3 Growing Right’s plan for exhibition and engagement also grew out of pop-up models for interaction popular in the current local food scene (where food trucks, pop-up installations, and kitchen takeovers reign supreme) and ideas about the power of ephemeral and sited engagement from the art-for-social-change and public history worlds. Out of this nexus, we decided to share our work where Ohioans shop and eat. Our project, thus, moves in stride with emerging trends in both emplaced and mobile cultural interpretive work and across public history, arts, and museum worlds, to collaborating with audiences, instead of educating them.4

The Growing Right Project: Ecological Farming in Ohio, 1970s-Now is a multimodal environmental folklife, oral history, and public history project launched in 2016 as a partnership between folklorist and environmental humanist Jess Lamar Reece Holler and the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA). Founded in 1979, OEFFA is Ohio’s leading voice in organic farming education, certification, and policy advocacy. The organization helped build the organic movement in Ohio, from the ground up. As a public culture project, Growing Right launched out of mutual attention to and interests in the changing status of organics in contemporary culture. As organics have become more ubiquitous and as the success of the overall movement eclipses the history of OEFFA, we have sought ways to track the specific cultural history and players shaping this movement and remind wider publics that the ecological food and farm movement has always been an intersectional social movement and is, by no means, done organizing. For more, see www.oeffa.org and growingrightproject.com.
OEFFA Grain Growers’ Chapter President Dave Shively of Shively Farms in Henry, Ohio.

Photo by Jess Lamar Reece Holler, for OEFFA’s Growing Right Project.

Sharing authority, or, rather, a shared authority, has been a central concern in public folklore, oral history, and public history practice since Michael Frisch popularized the term (1990). Vernacular culture work and the listening arts take the work a step further; often, we folklorists literally collaborate with and co-curate alongside communities of practice. Examples include the Wisconsin Teachers of Local Culture’s cultural tours, developed collaboratively by folklorists, teachers, and community cultural organizations; and the community co-curated documentary exhibitions of the Philadelphia Folklore Project, such as the 2016 Tibetans in Philadelphia exhibit. Recent volumes in the wider cultural organizing field, like the Pew Foundation’s Letting Go: Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World (2011), following on the heels of calls like Nina Simon’s The Participatory Museum (2010), have pushed the imprimatur for sharing authority in documentation and also in interpretation of fieldwork and public historical materials a step further: beyond the conventional, assumed spaces of public cultural work practice (libraries, archives, universities, museums) and out into new digital realms and on-the-ground places where communities live and work. Mobile and emplaced methodologies—what one panel at the National Council for Public History’s 2016 meeting in Baltimore provocatively called “the new mobile public history”—suggest that perhaps public culture work is most effective when produced by and for home audiences and communities and installed locally. This special affordance for social engagement, in the spirit of trans-local organizing, is also created when such work deliberately takes up wheels and shares out across communities. It is here, and with our eyes on emplaced, ambient, and existing potential audiences, that we rooted Growing Right’s public programming.
Grassroots Education: The History of OEFFA

OEFFA was founded in 1979 after a Cincinnati based land conservation organization, Rural Resources, called together activists from the Federation of Ohio River Co-ops (FORC) and upstart and reformed farmers, grocers, and consumers with a bold charge: Why couldn’t the organic, chemical-free food that the burgeoning co-op movement was demanding be grown in Ohio, instead of shipped from organic farms in California and elsewhere? To do that, someone would have to train and educate farmers and consumers in an era when land-grant institutions like Ohio State University thought organics were bunk (Anderson 1983), and they would also have to build, by hand, a new local foods infrastructure. This was Ohio’s nascent organic movement, before it even recognized itself as such.

The first OEFFA conference in 1979, according to project oral history interviews and print cultural sources, drew at least three disparate crowds: “back-to-the-lander” hippies many people might think of when imagining early organic farmers; “salt of the earth” farmers, many well into middle age, who grew up before the age of chemical agriculture and witnessed firsthand the harmful effects of a first generation of American pesticides on their lands, livestock, and bodies; and a new wave of conscientious consumers connecting environmental and health activism to demands for clean food for themselves and their families.

Like so many young movements for social change, early OEFFA was run out of basements, garages, and living rooms, and was catalyzed by homespun print ephemera that don’t often make it into archives: Xeroxed newsletters, flyers, and bulletins did the work of education and policy advocacy, building a virtual imagined community out of a dispersed mobile public history/culture work in action

Many exciting projects have provided inspiration for Growing Right’s mobile sensibilities. Public historian and social practice artist Erin Bernard’s Philly History Truck, for example, operates on an innovative exhibit cycle: It comes into neighborhoods to collect, document, and collaboratively design a themed exhibit on neighborhood history and life, launches a pop-up exhibit in a local space, then moves elsewhere. Janis Thiessen’s oral-history-based Manitoba Food History Truck follows a similar model. Digital projects too, like liberatory archives worker Jarrett Drake’s collaborative A People’s Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland, California’s collaborative Anti-Eviction Mapping project, or the FracTracker Alliance, or the FracTracker Alliance born out of a citizen science concern for the often-invisibilized landscape of fracking in the U.S., similarly scale up and aggregate local perceptions and experiences and allow for new sorts of trans-local witnessing and, with that, action.

In our same moment, however, still other leading-edge projects seek to emplace the work of oral history and folklife radically in contexts where the work can vibrate in resonance with its surroundings. For works in this vein, see Suzanne Snider’s oral history listening parties and automotive archives, the Laundromat Project, Tennessee Watson and Lauren Hadden’s Wage/Working jukebox project, Aman Mojadidi’s phone booth oral history project in New York City, Concordia University’s Centre for Oral and Digital Storytelling’s themed soundwalks in postindustrial Montreal, and their A Flower in the River commemorative audio procession project. The wider environmental justice vernacular cultural mode of the toxic tour as discussed in Phaedra Pezzulo’s Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice (2007) and available for research via countless YouTube videos similarly puts embodied mobility to work to convey historic or occluded environmental harms.
network of growers, grocers, activists and consumers but also a real community that did political and social work. OEFFA’s annual *Good Earth Guide*—originally a print edition and now an online directory listing all organic producers and ecologically sympathetic grocers and outlets in Ohio—connected participants across the state, made neighbors aware of each other, and helped draw together the early supply-and-demand networks that helped develop a system of farmers’ markets around the state.

Grassroots and popular education were central to OEFFA from the beginning, too. From that first gathering, what became OEFFA’s celebrated annual statewide conference brought seasoned and new farmers, growers, and consumers together to talk about everything from how to make a profit by growing organic garlic to how to launch direct marketing to the groundwork and policy planning required to establish Ohio’s first set of organic standards. Local chapters took on direct organizing, market cultivation, and policy work from Ashtabula to Athens to the Ohio River. Popular summer farm tours rounded out the program and brought consumers and other farmers directly to successful organic farms to discuss growing methods, animal husbandry, terrain, and environmental challenges and victories. The tours have been a key educational tool. Ohio’s ecological farmers had to band together and teach each other, so place-based and experiential education, in which a farmer invites a crowd to come to her farm and learn how she does it, was the modus operandi for OEFFA and the organic farming movement from its earliest moments.

Ohio’s organic movement, thus, is a story of polygenesis at its best: a movement formed at the intersection of diverse other social moments, including the women’s movement, spiritual calls to ecological consciousness (Mary Lu Lageman 2017), 1970s anti-strip mining

**Collaborator Reflection: Executive Director**

Standing at the brink of OEFFA’s 40th anniversary, we as staff knew there was a lot of history about which we and our members could be proud . . . if only we knew it. After four decades, few original founders and members were still around; they’d moved away, gotten involved in other pursuits, and, sadly, died before we could capture their stories. But we were certain that something extraordinary had occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s and wanted to know it and share it. Especially for a new generation who might sneer at organics precisely because its great success has converted it from something revolutionary to mainstream, telling this story is urgent. But as a small nonprofit with limited human and financial resources, we could never have undertaken this documentary work on our own.

From my background teaching sustainable agriculture in an interdisciplinary, liberal arts context, I’d listened to many of Ohio’s organic pioneers share their stories of organic conversion with my students and mentally catalogued recurrent themes of health scares, family disagreements, neighbor scorn, “going cold turkey” challenges of transition, and eventual triumph. I knew that Ohio’s early organic farmers had resolutely and generously taught themselves and each other and that their isolation from traditional agricultural institutions had given the organization a grassroots legacy that continues today.

Collaborating on the *Growing Right* Project has been an opportunity for organizational learning for us: learning (again) the value of storytelling, learning about OEFFA’s own history, deepening our relationships with key members by hearing their stories, full length, in their own words, learning how to collaborate well beyond our disciplinary and methodological wheelhouse.

—Carol Goland, Executive Director, OEFFA
activism in Appalachian Ohio (Rich and Sally Banfield 2016), concern about the toxicity of agricultural chemicals (Ralph Straits 2016), rural-urban food sovereignty programs (Frye 2016), and the farm labor organizing movement in Western Ohio (Shafer 2017)—among others. OEFFA uniquely allowed these various actors to constellate themselves across the state and, through the drafting of state organic standards and rise of OEFFA’s certification program, to build a recognized label for organics to address the growing consumer demand for chemical-free and ecologically produced food.

OEFFA had, of course, grown out of its own storied history, but by 2016 when our project launched, organic foods were more ubiquitous than ever. With so many changes in the players and landscape, OEFFA itself had lost touch with some of the specific history of how this movement came to be. In short, right at a moment when reflection on our movement's roots to catalyze a stronger future was most critical, our hindsight vision was fuzzy—but our movement history wasn’t yet entirely out of reach.

Together, we saw a window to do radical roots work to bring the stories, activism, and provocation of the early organics movement to the table again for an era of ever-increased climate uncertainty, terrifying new extractive regimes, and continuing corporate and chemical assault on the integrity of our food and water systems. Figuring out how to tell a story about this diverse movement that was already self-aware and rooted in the work of consciousness-raising through place-based participatory instruction and consumer education, however, was a taller order. It turns out the answer was not so much in the how but in the where. A folkloristic perspective and listening-arts based documentary media toolkit, combined with bringing the fruits of our documentation directly to consumers in a farmers’ market setting, helped amplify the sometimes-forgotten stories behind today’s organic movement and directly heighten consumer awareness, and then participation, in the movement through buying organic food.

Thus, (almost) from the get-go, and with some spurs from a visionary state humanities program and a wonderful team of project humanities consultants, we imagined a destiny for Growing Right beyond the archive. Our project amplified the relationship between preservation and access and immediately fueled fieldwork back into the world to foster opportunities, encounters, conversations, and the possibility for social and personal transformation toward a more just world.

Popular education continues today through tours. Organic vegetable farmer Mick Luber hosted a farming and fracking tour at his Bluebird Farm in Cadiz, Ohio, as a part of OEFFA’s Summer 2016 farm tour series. This tour, in the midst of Eastern Ohio’s pipeline construction frenzy, aimed to show other farmers and consumers what the threat of Eastern Ohio’s fracking boom looks like firsthand on one of Ohio's earliest certified organic farms.10

PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION SITE WITH CARNIVALESCQUE BUNTING, NEAR BLUEBIRD FARM IN HARRISON COUNTY, OHIO. 16MM FILM STILL FROM FARMING IN THE AGE OF FRACKING.11
Thus, popular education was baked into *Growing Right*’s design before we turned on an audio recorder. *Growing Right* sought to document a usable past for a grassroots movement before the movement’s founders passed on, yes; but, as critically, we aimed to circulate these stories in the world through a unique pop-up exhibit format, interview indexes created through the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History’s Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS) platform, and curated multimedia pieces.

Our vision was to take *Growing Right* to the streets to bring our project interviews and fieldwork documentation to sites of Central Ohio food shopping encounters to surprise, educate, sometimes delight, and, occasionally, offend. Our pedagogy was designed to mirror and reflect the active, ongoing popular and grassroots education philosophy of Ohio’s organic movement. In this way, *Growing Right* embodies the spirit of the boots-on-the-ground education work that many of OEFFA’s farmers do at farmers’ markets every week of the growing season, when they share the philosophy, personal beliefs, growing practices, and ecologies of food. We feel good about using this model of education that has worked for 40 years and is emic to the movement, while also extending it to uncovering and commemorating OEFFA’s history and amplifying the stories of the particular people and places who grew today’s movement, whether or not they’re still at market.
Not Just “Expensive Kale”
From the beginning, OEFFA’s consumer education was a sort of counter-education; the ecological farm movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s stood starkly counter to mainstream agricultural education and practice. *Growing Right* interviews with early organic farmers make clear that the organic movement in Ohio took consumers’ concerns about the impacts of food and agricultural chemicals quite seriously and was deeply influenced by farmers’ negative experiences with chemicals on their own bodies and the ecosystems where they lived and worked. The organic movement also dedicated itself to building alternative spaces of access to food grown safely, without toxic chemicals, on farm stands, at farmers’ market, or via a growing network of bold early Ohio natural grocery and cooperative stores. In these spaces people could get organic, Ohio-grown food for themselves and exchange the knowledge that ultimately built our movement.

Part of our project design endeavored to re-expose the grown-over roots of organic farming as a radical social movement nurtured by consumer advocacy and grassroots environmental activism. Just like the early organic movement exposed the dangers behind chemical pesticides and fertilizers, so too was *Growing Right* designed to include the labor, voices, perspectives, and concerns of those who had launched the movement but might be occluded from contemporary visibility—especially in the hustle and bustle of a booming local farmers’ market. Thus, in the spirit of the early movement, we pitched our public pop-up exhibits to “all Ohio eaters.” We wanted to reach organic consumers who shopped at farmers’ markets already but might not have thought of the history of organizing that created those markets. We also wanted to reach consumers who might sneer at organic produce, thinking, “It’s just more expensive kale,” and to those for whom food access and affordability is a real issue.

Here, too, a folkloristic perspective proved useful. It was these recalcitrant visitors whom we especially hoped to engage with the stories of the particular people and places that built Ohio’s organics movement. Maybe this engagement wouldn’t or couldn’t change their minds on the kale, but we did hope the history of the movement, shared directly in the voices of its founders, would spark even a quick consideration of why so many Ohio farmers have spent their lives building a healthy, chemical-free foodshed for Ohio and beyond. In the best possible scenarios, we got to talk about what these cautious naysayers felt might make organic food more accessible or possible as a sustainable agriculture for our work.

Early Ohio organic herb farmer Karen Langan, of Mulberry Creek Herb Farms in Erie County, Ohio. Photo by Jess Lamar Reece Holler, for OEFFA’s *Growing Right* Project.
Designing Growing Right: The “Where” of the Pedagogy

Growing Right was born as an engaged archival project with plans for a digital exhibit. Working in the vein of many archives and public and local history organizations, we were thrilled to build a critical resource for OEFFA, today’s broader organic movement, and consumers. However, as Stephen High powerfully suggests in his reflection on the inspiring locative, mobile, and otherwise in-situ oral history experiments and public-facing products of Concordia University’s Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, “One wonders, however, if the [I]nternet is the place for deep listening” (2013). After David Merkowitz of Ohio Humanities reviewed an initial draft of our grant proposal for project support, he said something that synced with what High suggests and radically expanded our imagination of places of public encounter: Many a digital public humanities project is born and dies and nobody knows it ever lived at all. What if, he suggested, we got out to do talks or narrative stages about the digital project website as promotion for the project? And what if we did this someplace fitting for the movement, like a farmers’ market? We took David’s idea and ran. We came back with a changed project that mimicked the grassroots popular educational strategies—from farm tours to hands-on workshops—OEFFA has been using to catalyze the ecological food and farm movement in Ohio since the beginning.

History and vernacular culture, it turns out, have much the same problem as an organic farm: They’re often hidden from view. Likewise, not every tomato easily tells her story. Growers at a neighborhood farmers’ market are required to provide a “growing practices” sheet. Growing Right saw that a behind-the-scenes tour or a website is also needed to make visible the arc of the labor and vision behind organic food’s ecologies—ecologies that may be hidden when that tomato shows up, silent, on the table, without the farmer there to narrate. And certainly, the story of the founding generation of Ohio organic growers wasn’t being told at the North Market or Worthington Farmers’ Market on a bustling July day in 2017. To get to that story, you have to squint and imagine back before there were farmers’ markets or even organic labels at all. Visibility is especially an issue for Ohio’s organic grain and dairy farmers, many of whom sell their products on commodity markets and don’t interface and share their stories with customers directly. Growing Right’s public exhibition plan gave us a chance to redirect our sense of our audience from dispersed publics on computers to the incidental audiences at our chosen markets and grocery stores. We could see, talk with, and directly engage with oral histories and fieldwork documentation of Ohio’s original organic farms right as they shopped locally.

Designing for an environmental oral history/folklife pop-up exhibit tour to farmers’ markets and grocery stores also gave us the opportunity to situate our oral histories and transmit sense of place across spaces—sharing the journey organic food takes from farm to market. Thus, our pop-up tour

Farmer Bob Henson, of Henson Family Farm in Clinton County, Ohio, cheers during a viewing of a prototype Growing Right multimedia piece featuring many of his friends and fellow early Ohio organic farmers during Growing Right’s pop-up exhibit at the trade show hall at OEFFA’s 2017 Annual Conference in Dayton.

Photo by Jess Lamar Reece Holler, for OEFFA’s Growing Right Project.
to farmers’ markets and groceries in Central Ohio afforded the chance to cluster the faces, sights, and sounds of a farm in Ashtabula or Clinton County for an audience in greater Columbus. It invited audiences to consider how those local ecologies, the environment to the human labor of building the movement, played into the landscape of Ohio organics. Suzanne Snider of the Oral History Summer School teaches that one of the most powerful effects of oral history recording is to get bodies in a room to experience listening together. These listening parties, as Suzanne calls them, might seem innocuous but are potentially powerful moments of co-witnessing the shared texts of people’s lives. They bring together people who might be changed by an encounter with an oral history recording and do something with that affective experience. Growing Right aimed to do that with our organic movement oral histories and fieldwork photos. Thus, our pop-up’s presence in the ordinary farmers’ market layout—with the pasta vendor or French pastry baker on one side and the family farmstead or pickle lady on the other—could also queer the temporal expectations of the markets and provide a diachronic moment of movement history at the farmers’ market itself. Growing Right sought to create an opening to restore the fuller ecology—cultural and historical—of a market’s organic wares, in the midst of an otherwise unbroken present tense. In an era of “know your farmer, know your food,” the popular education and public folklore work of Growing Right, in celebrating OEFFA’s history and exposing the story of Ohio organics, insists that’s not just an edict that should exist in our neatly bounded contemporary moment.

Folklorist Jess Lamar Reece Holler poses with a seedling and a Growing Right pop-up tour rack card at one of the exhibit’s three installations at the Franklin Park Conservatory Farmers’ Market, Columbus.

Photo by Christie Nohle, Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens.

Although our pop-ups were initially designed to advertise our multimedia website and digital public humanities project, they quickly became their own form of public engagement—ephemeral and temporal, sure, but also shot through with the unique pedagogical affordances of the fieldworker and curated clips from fieldwork with Ohio’s founding organic farmers being on site at real Central Ohio farmers’ markets. Embedding our educational work in the farmers’ market space enabled us to engage and document new stories formally, through early experimentation with Michael Frisch’s PixStori app and vox pop field recording and photography of shoppers interacting with our exhibit, and via unrecorded conversations and exchanges with those
wandering into the booth. Not unlike the project website, however, the pop-up exhibit tour also performed a telescoping scale of place within the locations and contexts we chose for exhibition. Although we could only set up our tent at one market or grocery at a time, our presence signaled and made explicit the actual multiplicity of places, locations, ecologies, movements, and times that made up the organic movement across its history.

Co-Curation All the Way Down: Collaborating Within the Movement

Our exhibit project brought together two strands: our ongoing fieldwork project documenting oral histories and media from farms and other locations across the state and the print cultural history. Our chief collaborator in this latter effort was Scott Williams, an early FORC activist, early OEFFA member, and ecological food and farm movement community archivist. I met Scott in the audience at OEFFA’s 2015 conference, where a narrative stage that became the early inception for this project was being convened by folklorist and rural sociologist Howard Sacks of Kenyon College’s Rural Life Center. From a seat next to mine, Scott regaled me with horror stories of the day when farmer, co-operative activist, and early OEFFA member Mick Luber brought a binder of photos of the movement’s early days to an OEFFA conference in the mid-1980s, to a “recap of the early days” panel. The event was packed, conversation afterward was great, and, in the shuffle, Mick’s binder was lost. With it, decades of pictorial evidence of the movement disappeared. Luckily, despite such mishaps in OEFFA’s memory keeping, the movement has Scott. Trained in archival work and president of the Columbus chapter of the Aldus Society for Rare Books, Scott has spent the past 40-odd years unofficially maintaining an archive of early print ephemera from the ecological food, farm, and co-operative movements in Ohio, including pamphlets, the early run of OEFFA newsletters, marketing brochures, historic editions of OEFFA’s Good Earth Guides … and 30 years’ worth of organic food labels.

Collaborator Reflection: Project Co-Curator/Archivist

The most valuable aspect of OEFFA’s Growing Right project for me was to see and participate in the dialogues with the public who visited the pop-up installation at farmers’ markets. We reminded older folks, and shared with younger ones, how just a few people started this region’s organic food and farm movement—easy access to which is taken for granted today! We debated. We informed. We networked. And we had fun. I enjoyed sharing with folks of all ages peculiar (often organic) fruit and vegetable labels that I have been collecting since they began to be heavily used, starting in late 1970s. But seeing the public take an interest in hearing the oral history of OEFFA was the best! We were giving the original organic farmers of OEFFA each their 15 minutes of fame! Starting in the 1970s, I was involved with writing, marketing, and archiving the history of our natural bulk whole food co-op movement, which got me into saving OEFFA’s print culture due to my crossover involvement. While serving on OEFFA’s board during a transitional phase (all volunteer to part-time manager) about ten years after its founding, I helped with fundraising, conferences, writing, and marketing. Again, I always tried to save fleeting examples of our print culture like membership brochures and conference vendor handouts. We continue to face strong obstacles to achieve our vision of a globally just and ecologically sound food system. I like to think that OEFFA’s Growing Right Project is working to strengthen the public’s awareness of just how precious our small foothold is.

— Scott Williams, Project Co-Curator and Movement Archivist
Scott’s collection became the basis for the print culture part of our exhibit and helped diversify its voice. We took clear curatorial steps to ensure the public understood the organic movement was built by people, so it was important not to back-impose a monolithic story on that history. As such, Scott decided on several categories of print materials at the hinge of the other movements that birthed it and continued alongside Ohio’s organic food and farm movement—like the Midwest’s historic co-operative movement. Ultimately, our pop-up exhibit showcased a rotating set of “curated” facsimile documents in five broad categories: OEFFA newsletters, brochures, miscellaneous and oversized documents, the history of the co-op movement, and the history of food labels. In keeping with best practices in museum studies and the public humanities, Scott and I worked together to co-curate his collection: first, through mini-oral history interviews on the provenance of each items in his collection and then, through many cycles of co-writing. The finished item-level labels are in his voice, with the larger exhibit-level labels featuring two sections—my commentary from the vantage of synthesizing the fieldwork together with these print cultural sources and Scott’s as the collector and curator who has stewarded these materials over the years and directly participated in their making.

Although it admittedly baffled some, the exhibit also worked to foreground the process of its own curation: Scott’s decades of collecting and my fieldwork and documentation process. Rather than mystify the journey from dispersed statewide social movement to nonprofit organization to oral history and folklife exhibition, we decided to show our seams and turn that process inside out. We chose this for fellow methods geeks like ourselves and to demystify the organic movement and portray it as an active grassroots effort that grew with every little contribution and came to influence how Americans could access and demand information about food origins in major ways (like food labels).

Jeremy Purser’s custom-designed oral history posters at Growing Right’s two-week installation at the Keller Market House—a regional foods aggregator housed in a historic grocery store in downtown Lancaster, Ohio. Poster design and idea based on Clara Gamalski’s (free snacks) project, documenting class and food choice preferences in Pittsburgh.

Politics of the Excerpt: Designing for Ambient Attentions
A major challenge and opportunity was how to display long-form oral histories, interviews, and audio farm tours in a pop-up setting, designing not for event-based attention (like a more
conventional documentary screening or public folklore narrative stage) but for ambient, wandering, interruptive, and interrupted attentions. After discussions with our public humanities consultants, we knew we had about three minutes to hook people on-site. Any further engagement would rely upon interest generated through those three minutes and the snappy design of our project postcards. These linked to our website and each referenced a different Ohio farm, farmer, or grocer featured in our interviews. Modular design thus was critically important. Riffing on the model of the Southern Foodways Alliance modular toolkit, which includes a full-length oral history, representative photography sample, and short slideshow, we created a series of short multimedia slideshows to accompany our long-form interviews. Some focused on particular farmers and others, like our chemicals and health piece, offered similar and contrasting experiences across multiple farms, locations, and generations to give a diverse perspective on how a particular issue or concern manifested in Ohio’s ecological food and farm movement.

Excerpting a full-length history to a digestible multimedia short, of course, is a political act. Who gets to say what part of someone’s life story, labor history, and movement involvement makes the cut? Moreover, narrative moments that “pop” for a visitor to catch a narrative of someone’s life may not be the ineffable moments and attitudes that define a person’s sense of ecological attachment and entanglement—the primary thing we sought to communicate. Thus, much of the time (and in presentations we’ve shared on the project) we went for conversion stories, which cropped up across many interviews in which farmers define a particular moment or event that brought them to organic farming work. Other pieces simply introduced the farmer and tried to go “beyond the human,” following recent attentions to multi-species ecological method, to give a sense of a life in organic work. Our pop-up eventually adopted a multimodal strategy: We presented formats and listening/viewing opportunities ranging from full-length oral histories (over headphones or speaker), short multimedia pieces, and donated iPods fitted with ambient/environmental soundwalks from farms across Ohio.

Although it made for less strongly curated visitor experiences and opened the floodgates for multiple interpretations, we found that there was something more honest in displaying our full-length oral histories and offering the chance to drop the cursor wherever they wanted. They could...
understand they were hearing part of a longer, more contextualized encounter rather than a cleaned-up, didactic excerpt with one pinned-down intervention. Critically, however, the short pieces allowed us to show sense of place and give visitors a rich sensory encounter with a mediated framing of the farmer’s places and ecologies, vistas that unintentionally might get occluded at the farmers’ market and grocery store. These images, rotating at four-seconds-per-image speed baked into the iMovie software, allowed a different scope and scale to our short pieces that perhaps countered the tidy, necessarily incomplete audio excerpt.

Importantly, we presented multimedia experiences on an iPad atop vintage orchard crates juxtaposed with a set of static, pop-art designed oral history posters, envisioned by our graphic designer on the model of food studies scholar and activist Clara Gamalski’s (free snacks) installation in Pittsburgh. Each poster presents one narrator with a quote from the interview. Designed in an arresting pop-art style in bright neons, the posters formed a backdrop “quilt” to the exhibit and allowed an ordinarily time-based narrative medium (oral history), as well as the wide scope and range of the project’s narrator pool, to connect visually all at once. We weren’t, of course, off the hook with the politics of the excerpt. We tried to select a variety of quotes on

Growing Right Audio and Multimedia

Listen to this excerpt from an oral history interview with farmer Alex Dragovich of Mud Run Farm in Stark County on fracking threats in Eastern Ohio and the importance of clean water. 

Listen to this excerpt from an oral history interview with farmer Mick Luber of Bluebird Farm in Harrison County on how he got involved with the early organic food and farm movement in Ohio.
https://soundcloud.com/itsyrmisfortune/mick-luber-harrison-co-interview-excerpt-organic-farming

See a multi-media slideshow from an oral history interview and fieldwork visit with farmer Mary Lu Lageman of the Grailville Community in Clermont County on what drew her to agriculture and to Grailville after an early life in the environmental movement.
https://youtu.be/8KL3vCZTxjc

View this excerpt from an oral history interview and fieldwork visit with farmers Anne and John Hohmann of Clearview Farm in Licking County on how they came to Clearview; and opposition to the dominant culture of chemicals in the American agricultural system.
https://youtu.be/_So8aAr_Tnc

View this introduction to the Growing Right Project that models the multimedia slideshow format the project used from the beginning.
https://youtu.be/WXSPt3bQcfw
Growing Right: Pop-Up and Popular Pedagogies for Public Environmental Folklife

Different topics—the toxic smell of pesticides that drove one young grain farmer to convince his father and brother to farm organically, the importance of risk for entrepreneurship, the small miracles and big politics of ecological stewardship—so we weren’t just using our narrators to spew some central vision of organics. Ultimately, the short quotes we chose and the posters went up on a particular day, influencing the message of the overall booth.

The project benefited enormously from our partnership with Jeremy Purser of Slow Poach Design—a farm and kitchen worker, and an experimental sound artist who happened to be a former junior designer at Modern Farmer magazine. In our graphic design collaboration, we tried to design for the same ecological consciousness we wanted to inspire or invite in our potential audiences. Our design approach, from the main font to posters, postcards, and rack cards evoked bright 1980s themes and reflected the visual culture of the era of the rise of OEFFA, organic farming certification standards, and solidification of the movement in Ohio.

Importantly, our bold 1980s-meets-ethnography look wasn’t what people expected when they thought of organic farming. Inundated with images of carrots, baskets, straw hats, and roosters, we wanted to push the dominant (and maybe stale) farmers’ market/organic farming visual culture to show the wider labor and ecologies behind popular organic farming narratives. Thus, our postcards pushed the chickens to the side of the frame and foregrounded the free-range lawn the chickens were pastured on, for example. Some popular images from the series of 12 postcards didn’t show people or food at all. Instead, they showcased the places, processes, and material culture of the behind-the-scenes lives that made this movement possible: stacked pastel-sea-foam cordwood with a pale pink border or a deep-blue-and-powder-pink rendition of grain farmer David Bell’s basketball hoop inside his soaring barn. We tried to embody environmental humanities methods in our rack card design, as well, with a checkerboard pattern drawing together dozens of fieldwork images of plants, hands, barn cats, pups, goats, chickens, and grains from across the state in a broad movement ecology. The rack card, which explicitly advertised our summer 2017 pop-up tour dates

Collaborator Reflection: Graphic Designer

I was very excited when Jess invited me to collaborate on Growing Right. I don’t often get the opportunity to develop a vision for a project from the ground up. Even rarer are opportunities to do that with people and a movement I feel so strongly aligned with. I wanted to bring an aesthetic that was simultaneously specific enough to appeal to the urban art-and-design-literate and still broad enough to engage people who aren’t often handling print ephemera and seeing exhibitions.

My strategy to achieve this was inspired by many of the cultural institutions and design studios that I collected brochures and catalogs from when I lived in New York City: Through pastiche I wanted to reference the beginning of the era that the project documents (1970s) while keeping it fresh and contemporary. I was energized by Jess’s support and enthusiasm for the direction I ideated. We worked together to refine the vision and landed on a design toolkit that lent itself to successive iterations of postcards and posters as the project progressed. Growing Right is near and dear to my heart—it was very satisfying to have a hand in broadcasting the voices and stories of growers on the frontier of a movement that was championing health, well-being of our lives, and the well-being of our land for ourselves and future generations.

— Jeremy Purser, Slow Poach Design and Growing Right Lead Designer
and locations, also served as a “grand scale” statement of our project’s reach and interacted nicely with the postcards, each featuring a specific farm and place documented in the project.

We released our project postcards in seasonal batches to reflect the tides of Central Ohio farmers’ markets. The first set launched in February in time for the annual OEFFA conference, an early May set marked the onset of spring produce, and a high-summer set launched as tomatoes hit the markets, and we hoped the limited-edition, designer-made sets would draw people back across the season, or lure them to follow our tour across multiple markets. We’re not totally sure if it worked—or if anyone explicitly came back to visit our exhibit at different farmers’ markets over the course of the summer just so that they could gather up a complete set of project postcards—but we’d like to think we helped inspire some seasonality in our pop-up exhibits, to match the spirit of the farmers’ markets.

What an Ecological Method Means for Fieldwork
Attention to an ecological method in our design work was sometimes at odds with how some elements of fieldwork practice tend to center the voice, authority, perspective, and attention upon human narrators and experiences. Folklife methods emphasize an attention to context in the performance of expressive cultural texts and often include documentation of material culture, landscape, built environment, and “surround.” The pressure for broadcast-quality sound and documentation as an archival and a publicly circulating record, however, anxiously animates both oral history and public folklore practice and in some ways hobbles the expansive ecological moves that Growing Right aimed to make. Why shut the door to cicadas, unplug a fridge, or avoid the sound of the rain on a shed roof if we’re trying not to reify a nature/culture divide, to cut off the human from her fundamental co-constitution in and with her places, environments?

Thanks to funding from the Greater Columbus Arts Council in our second summer of fieldwork, Growing Right could experiment liberally with ecological methods through other fieldwork means rooted in experimental time-based media practice. We headed back into the field prepared to record sit-down oral histories, process interviews, walking interviews, and broad photo-sets of our first fieldwork summer; but we also began to work in two new documentary forms: soundscape audio recording and 16mm film. Our soundscape recordings documented walks through a half dozen farms, homelands, and surrounds, recorded in real time. These less narrative forms, while not easily condensed, also resist the narrativizing that concerned us about some aspects of the project. Although still mediated by the recorder and the choice of where and how to stroll, these recordings communicate and transmit a sense of place and what Jeff Todd Titon has called a sound ecology (2017). Our foray into experimental 16mm film for a project on the effects of nonconventional oil and gas extraction in Eastern Ohio, Farming in the Age of Fracking, allowed us to use the Bolex camera’s unique single-frame and multi-frame shooting functions to create visual symphonies of still and moving images, organized by differing durations, in an attempt to capture the entangled ecologies of fracking and organic farm production on three farms in Stark, Harrison, and Belmont counties. We hope to loop this experimental footage via our iPad and iPod listening platforms into future pop-up exhibits.18
Growing Right’s pop-up exhibits have been about a simple question: What happens when we surface, show up, and interpret out (and out loud, on-site) the sometimes-lost, sometimes-forgotten, and sometimes-deliberately-obscured histories of the people, places, and labor behind our food, and the environmental impacts of how that food is grown...in the middle of a bustling market or grocery store? Ultimately, through our site-based exhibition practice, we’ve hoped to inspire changes of heart—sudden, surprising, and newfound attention to the larger economic, environmental, labor, and organizing ecologies that have made our now-robust and still-growing organic food and farm system possible. At the end of the day, of course, it’s difficult to measure impact. Was Growing Right successful? We can’t measure the pop-up tour’s influence on increased purchases of organic food or epiphanies. We’ve counted the modest boost in traffic to our website and YouTube oral histories after pop-up events, but in an era of standardized results our experiment has also been about a radical hope in an unfolding audience encounter, which may bloom then and there in the moment or spring up years down the line. These are the sorts of attention—a gradual orientation toward a whole way of seeing, a gradual inability to cordon off the risks and harms of agricultural chemicals to the people and communities most in danger of exposure and accumulation—that birthed Ohio’s organic movement. Following Martha Norkunas, we hope we’ve provided the space for encounter with the kind of deep “listening across differences” (2009) that might slowly suggest, on the strength of OEFFA’s founding farmers’ narratives and places, the planetary urgency of another way of connecting.

Looking ahead toward another Farm Bill, ongoing public debates about the toxicity of Monsanto’s RoundUp/glyphosate (Gillam 2017), increasing explosions and uncertainty for fracked communities in Southern and Eastern Ohio, and legality of repurposing and storage of toxic frack waste across the rest of the state, Growing Right hopes to take another leap with these local stories of movement-building, organizing, and resistance. In 2018–2019, we plan to launch a pilot podcast series; adapt our long-form oral histories, soundscape recordings, and walking and process interviews for a series of short documentary pieces for broadcast radio; edit a short experimental film on the impacts of nonconventional hydraulic fracturing and injection wells on Ohio organic farms; and publish our full series of OHMS-indexed interviews with curated fieldwork photography for OEFFA’s 40th anniversary in February 2019. While our pop-up tour may have been a temporary experiment, our work mirrors the everyday advocacy and education our farmers do every season, whether from the farmers’ market tent, the tractor, or lobbying in Washington, DC. We hope Growing Right provides a provocative example for how nonprofit agricultural, environmental, and citizen science organizations can collaborate with and through the public environmental humanities and long-established vernacular listening arts to encourage the divestments from toxic heritages and investments in regenerative practices necessary to combat a damaged food system in an era of ever-more urgent environmental crisis. Let’s usher in a new area of public environmental folklife devoted not just to telling the stories, but also staging encounters that just might finally be adequate to our (chemically-burdened), ecologically imperiled world.

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Growing Right: Pop-Up and Popular Pedagogies for Public Environmental Folklife

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URLs
Philadelphia Public History Truck: https://phillyhistorytruck.wordpress.com
Manitoba Food History Project: https://www.manitobafoodhistory.ca
A People’s Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland: http://www.archivingpoliceviolence.org/purpose
Anti-Eviction Mapping Project: https://www.antievictionmap.com
FracTracker Alliance: https://www.fractracker.org
Basilica Hudson (Automotive Archive, A Roving Memorial): http://basilicahudson.org/tag/suzanne-snider
The Laundromat Project: https://laundromatproject.org
Wage/Working: http://wageworking.org
Endnotes


2. This research, ongoing, was first generously sponsored through a 2016 Parsons Fellowship at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, in collaboration with Jeffrey P. Nagle, environmental, labor, and technology historian. For more on these important early cultural conservation and environmental folklife collections, many spearheaded by folklorist and cultural organizer Mary Hufford, visit the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, or see the Tending the Commons: Folklife and Landscape in Southern West Virginia digital exhibit at https://www.loc.gov/collections/folklife-and-landscape-in-southern-west-virginia/about-this-collection.

3. See Jens Lunds’ and Jill Linzee’s work in Washington State with the Northwest Heritage Resources’ Audio Tour Guides, AKA the Heritage Audio Tour Guides. For more information or to order, see Washington Folk Arts, a project of Northwest Heritage Resources http://www.washingtonfolkarts.com.


5. See the Wisconsin Teachers of Local Culture webpage and professional development resources at https://wtlc.csucm.wisc.edu and teacher-led cultural tours at https://wtlc.csucm.wisc.edu/teaching/teacher-led-cultural-tours.


10. See Take a Farm Stand Tour, in OEFFA’s 2016 Ohio Sustainable Food and Farm Tour Series, via https://lucas.osu.edu/sites/lucas/files/imce/LocalFood/OSU%202016%20Farm%20Tours.pdf, pp. 7; and Mick Luber’s Bluebird Farm, via OEFFA’s Good Earth Guide http://www.oeffa.org/userprofile.php?geg=1385.

11. Growing Right’s experimental film on the impacts of fracking and extraction on organic farms in Eastern Ohio. Film produced through a Program Support grant to OEFFA, from the Greater Columbus Arts Council (GCAC).

12. For more on OHMS and its rise out of the landscape of digital access demands for oral history archives and repositories, see Boyd, Douglas A. 2014. ‘I Just Want to Click on It To Listen’: Oral History Archives, Orality, and...


Excellent resources on oral history indexing aimed at students and educators in liberal arts contexts (but useful for community scholars and others) are also available via the Great Lakes Liberal Arts Consortium’s Oral History in the Liberal Arts (OHLA) initiative portal at http://ohla.info. Folklorists and cultural workers will also appreciate OHLA collective member and Oberlin College professor Ian MacMillen’s thoughtful project blog post, Between Oral History and Ethnography, http://ohla.info/between-oral-history-and-ethnography.

13. See multiple project interviews, most available at Growing Right Project’s homepage growingrightproject.com. Especially relevant here are interviews with Mick Luber, Bluebird Farm, Daryl, Diane and Denis Moyer of Moyer Brothers Farm, David Bell of Paul Bell & Sons Farm, and the Greggs of Gregg Farms.

14. For project interviews focused on the early history of natural foods markets, grocery stores, and co-operatives, see interviews with Sally and Jon Weaver-Summer, Margaret Nabors, Ed Perkins, Mick Luber, Scott Williams.


16. These reflections have been shaped by conversations with Shilarna Stokes as well as with project humanities consultants Howard Sacks, Brooke Bryan, Danille Christensen, and Sara Wood and Carol Goland, Scott Williams, and Jeremy Purser.


20. This concept of “staging the encounters that just might finally be adequate to our (chemically-burdened), ecologically imperiled world” should be credited to Mary Hufford, email messages to author, January-March 2016. See also Hufford, Mary. Working in the Cracks: Public Space, Ecological Crisis, and the Folklorist. Journal of Folklore Research. 36.2/3: 157-67.

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About the Laundromat Project. 2014. The Laundromat Project, https://laundromatproject.org/who-we-are/about.
Listeners connect posters to oral history and multimedia excerpts during Growing Right’s installation at Farm Aid 2017’s Homegrown Village, in Burgettstown, Pennsylvania.
Our River, Our Home: A Critical Pedagogy of Place
by Ellen McHale and John McKeeby

It’s Thursday afternoon in Amsterdam, New York, and area high school students are climbing the stairs at the Amsterdam Free Library for their weekly gathering of the Environmental Study Team (EST). Each Thursday from 4 to 6 p.m. this core group of dedicated teens participate in activities that promote the stewardship of their local waters, environment, and community. A partnership program of the New York Folklore Society and the Schoharie River Center (SRC), teens in Amsterdam’s EST program conduct quantitative scientific research about their local waters and engage with the area’s residents and its traditional arts through oral history interviews, media, and folklife documentation.

The Schoharie River Center’s EST is a year-round environmental science-based career and life skills development program of SRC, a nonprofit environmental and cultural organization. Working with youth ages 12 to 18 who live within the Mohawk and Schoharie Watersheds of New York State, the SRC’s EST programs teach youth to assess, record, and document the water quality and health of their communities’ local watersheds. Using EPA-approved testing and assessment procedures (water chemistry analysis, benthic-macroinvertebrate sampling and identification, and bacterial testing) SRC environmental educators work with EST teens in the field (and the streams) to conduct hands-on scientific inquiry-focused research on the ecology of the watershed—its plants, animals, insects, and geology.

As a partnering organization, the New York Folklore Society works with the same youth to teach ethnographic field methods to record the area’s human habitation—its folklore and oral narratives, material culture, occupational traditions, and cultural traditions. Youth in the program work with cameras, digital recorders, and video cameras to document the cultural makeup of the region.

All images are screen shots from “Our River… Our Home,” courtesy of the authors.
making cultural connections to the region’s waters and ecology, the program encourages the students’ intimate relationships with the environment and their place within this environment and the larger community. SRC and the New York Folklore Society have been engaged in an educational partnership since 2010, working closely with teens in a model of collaborative learning to document both the human and animal habitats.

As students explore watershed ecology they also speak to elders in the community, participate in hands-on folklife experiences, and learn the techniques and skills of oral history and ethnographic field methods. Students explore the “commons” that is the Mohawk/Schoharie Watersheds: They hike its trails, kayak its waters, ski its woods, replenish its riparian zones, and cycle its roadways. They participate in an annual archaeological field school, variously excavating water-powered mill sites on the Schoharie, abandoned Erie Canal locks, community gathering places, and slave and servant quarters of New York’s 18th and early 19th-century patroons to experience history and learn firsthand about daily foodways and community and agricultural activities. Drawing upon the folklife of the region, they are mentored by community elders to learn dry wall building techniques, historic timber framing methods for barn construction, blacksmithing, and fishing skills such as casting and dry fly making. They interview elders about their play experiences on the Schoharie Creek and their occupational experiences on the Mohawk Barge Canal. Annually students participate in the science of maple syrup production in a timber-framed traditional sugarhouse that several of them built. Throughout, they document their experiences with camera, video, and sometimes audio recording. Drawing upon the skills and methodologies of regional folklife documentation, students are provided instances where people share a body of folklore because of their attachment to place and their shared identity (Jones 1976), and the students both record and participate in those experiences.

The Methodology
The goal of EST is to increase youths’ understanding and knowledge of the emergent environmental issues confronting their communities and provide (through experiential learning) the skills and critical knowledge needed to analyze situations, make informed decisions, and take action to protect and improve the quality of their local environment (McKeeby, Jones, Keville, and McKeeby 2011). Youth come to the program from a variety of avenues: self, friend, or family referral (60 percent); referred by a school counselor, probation officer, or a community service provider (40 percent). Participation is voluntary, and most youth choose to participate for an average of four to five years, through middle and high school—years that are often times of turbulence and transformation for many young people. The EST program is intended to influence youth at many levels. Through focusing on their strengths, their natural curiosity and interest in the world, and their developmental needs, the program is able to establish areas of mastery, healthy relationships, and positive identity in the students’ lives. For troubled and at-risk youth, the EST program provides the physical and the psychological space to explore their world (the natural environment and community) through an objective lens based on the scientific methods of observation, data collection, and analysis. EST youth explore and assess their environment while working in teams with other youth and trained adult environmental educators, field biologists, archeologists, and community scholars.

Youth in EST meet weekly, with each of the regions’ five chapters conducting stewardship over their local waters. The Amsterdam Environmental Study Team meets in an after-school setting in
the local library. In 2017, through grants from the New York State Council on the Arts and the Community Foundation of the Capital Region, the EST program began to work with staff of the New York Folklore Society and Youth FX, an Albany-based video production program that engages youth in making media productions. Beginning in 2017, the EST team worked with Youth FX to learn techniques of video production and editing. As an object of study, they focused upon the newly constructed pedestrian bridge recently built to link two Amsterdam neighborhoods previously separated by the Mohawk River. The youth of the Amsterdam EST program had already experienced the difficulties in accessing the Mohawk River as the city, and its highway and railroad, provided barriers to direct access to the waterfront. Because of this, they were interested in documenting community perceptions of the Mohawk River and the impact upon these perceptions by the increased accessibility accorded by a pedestrian bridge that was newly completed. This pedestrian bridge linked two communities in Amsterdam and provided a way to traverse from highly industrialized North Amsterdam to the historic neighborhood of Port Jackson. The team’s short-term exposure to Youth FX’s film program resulted in a five-minute film shot and edited by the students.

Buoyed by this initial experience, the Amsterdam EST teens immediately began planning their next video documentary in a more direct merging of their hands-on scientific inquiry and video documentation. As with several communities in the northeastern U.S., Amsterdam is a 20th-century industrial city with an aging infrastructure. Its wastewater treatment system is dependent upon early 20th-century technology that includes aging sewage pipes as well as an outdated combined sewer/storm water outflow system (CSD) of handling rainwater. For decades, this aging sewer system of the city has been regularly malfunctioning, dumping raw sewage into the Mohawk River by way of the North Chuctanunda Creek. This has been compounded with each heavy rain as the combined stormwater/sewage drainage system that is a typical response mechanism to drainage in many cities is engineered to get rid of excess water by dumping it into our nation’s waterways. While Amsterdam is not alone in its need to mitigate sewage leaks into major waterways, the city
experienced ongoing problems in 2016 and 2017, probably as a result of climate change and a documented increase in the frequency of high rain events in this part of New York State. The frequent sewage discharges heightened public awareness of the problem.

After their initial success with shooting and editing *My River, My Home*, the teens of the Amsterdam Environmental Study Team program wanted to shoot and script their own documentary about the effects of outdated wastewater treatments systems on the health of the Mohawk watershed. Armed with cameras, notebooks, and video equipment, the team set out to study the problem and determine the extent of public awareness. Adult leaders conceived of their role as catalysts and mediators, helping students to explore their “place” through the memories, experiences, and words of Amsterdam’s narrators and tradition bearers. Drawing upon previous folklore fieldwork, the program introduced students to people who might provide points of view that they might not get from the governmental structures or civic leaders who are most often the spokespeople for communities. Students interviewed community members such as a lock tender on the Mohawk Barge Canal; the Haudenosaunee Mohawk spiritual leader Tom Porter, who had founded a new Mohawk community on the shores of the Mohawk River; key high school teachers; local historians; and community scholars. The students spent an afternoon with the engineering staff of the New York State Canal Corporation who are directly responsible for the canal system’s maintenance. On several occasions, they interviewed the many casual boaters and yachtsmen who have taken advantage of Amsterdam’s marina and dock space. They contacted the mayor and public works personnel. They conducted a survey, using psychometric indicators, to ascertain whether the new pedestrian bridge has affected feelings of “place attachment” with Amsterdam’s residents who are increasingly finding the bridge to be a pleasant recreational space. These experiences were added to the ethnographic documentation collected in 2016 and early 2017. Folklore and education professionals provided models and visionary leadership for the effective engagement of students with tradition bearers and community scholars.

**Merging Cultural Documentation and Environmental Education**

The experiential nature of environmental education has been shown to be effective in the development of social skills, individual agency, and competence (Chawla 2006). As youth encounter their physical and cultural environments, they learn that they can think critically about their communities and their roles as agents of change within their community (Schusler et al. 2009). Youth engaged in experiential learning through the EST program frequently enter the program with a hands-off attitude towards scientific inquiry, having learned the scientific methods taught in school but being told they will have an opportunity for direct participation only when they reach more advanced studies. In EST, microscopes are provided to each individual to view biological samples and one middle schooler expressed disbelief that she would actually get to “touch” the microscope. Another student who spent five years in the EST program related that her field biology class in college was repeating activities in which she had actively engaged as a 15-year-old EST member.

The process of experiential learning begins with students at only a rudimentary knowledge of field biology but with a genuine curiosity and eagerness to learn more. The EST model is joyful, allowing them to move from question to question to arrive at the answer. In the meantime, they are fully enjoying the sensory experience of being outdoors and in the moment of discovery and knowledge formation.
The geographer Yi Fu Tuan has provided an important framework for effective education in the “out of doors” through his theorizing about place and the role of place in culture. In his work on “senses of place,” Tuan observes that places gain meaning through the activity that we partake when in that locale, through the sharing of experience with other individuals, and the memories of the experiences in a place that bind us to that place in the future. Environmental psychologists have further examined Tuan’s concept and have made the distinctions between place “meaning”—the importance that individuals ascribe to a place—and place “attachment,” the degree to which individuals forge their identity through their relationship with place. Place-based educators have shown that youth shape their affordances—their “possibilities for action”—through participating in activities within their communities and in the social interactions that occur within community settings. Delia and Krasny point out that these opportunities lead to the development of youth assets such as caring, contribution, and competence while incorporating critical thinking and awareness (Delia, Jesse and Krasny, Marianne 2018). Using students’ personal senses of place and their attachment to a locale through the EST program strengthens their educational experience. In their focus upon informed action, EST youth demonstrate that they can use their perceptual senses to draw conclusions. In acting upon their concerns, their connections to place are strengthened.

Educator David Gruenewald suggests that the study of “place” foregrounds “a narrative of local and regional politics that are attuned to the particularities of where people actually live.” He calls for educational approaches that are concerned with context and those that are predicated upon the value of learning from and nurturing specific places, communities, and regions (Gruenewald 2003, 3). Gruenewald challenges the educator to move beyond current place-based (and celebratory) education models to link ecology to critical themes such as urbanization and the homogenization of culture. He advocates for a framework of “eco-justice,” which understands the relationships between ecological and cultural systems, addresses environmental racism, revitalizes the non-commodified traditions of different racial and ethnic groups and communities, and supports reconceiving and adapting our lifestyles in ways that will not jeopardize the environment for future generations (Gruenewald 2003). In using the lens of eco-justice, one recognizes the responsibility
to conserve and restore our shared environments for future generations. Gruenewald calls attention to the skills and talents of ethnographers in his description of a place-based education and ecojustice model that relates directly to student experiences of the world and improves the quality of life for people and communities in all locales—urban, suburban, and rural. His is a pedagogy of place that evaluates the appropriateness of our relationships to each other and to our socio-ecological places. He calls for students to re-inhabit their places—to pursue social action that improves the social and ecological life of places (Gruenewald 2003).

The Process at Work
With the established EST model of youth-driven inquiry, the Amsterdam cultural documentation and videography project was similarly driven by youth. Through a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, inexpensive but high-quality video equipment was purchased to create two documentation kits that would require the students to work in teams of at least three for the actual recording, with one student serving as the interviewer, one monitoring the sound recording, and one monitoring the video camera. When there were additional students, SLR cameras were provided so no one was left without a role. With two documentation kits, students could actually accomplish a two-angle shoot or record additional footage while one team was engaged in an interview.

Throughout, students were in control of the situation. With guidance from the adult leaders (folklorist Ellen McHale and environmental educators John McKeeby and Scott Hadam), students discussed the water quality problems that they would like to highlight and individuals whom they thought would help them attain the knowledge that was required. Students made lists of the individuals in their community whom they felt it was important to reach. They made the appointments and set up the interview situations, requiring persistence and direct interactions with unknown adults in their community. As the project continued and the students gained knowledge of the issues, their lists of interview subjects expanded. Not surprisingly, they began the project by interviewing their favorite teachers at the high school. An interview with a high school English teacher revealed that not only had he grown up on the Mohawk River, but his father was a foreman in charge of a portion of the canal system from Lake Champlain to Utica. A subsequent interview pointed students to an engineer within the Canal Corporation, and so on. As students followed these leads they also found that the individuals inhabiting their home and school networks could connect them to the wider community in ways that they had not envisioned. Information sources became multidimensional. As their knowledge deepened, so too did their perspectives. An interview with the Amsterdam Water Works supervisor led them to the city engineer, who shared his perspectives on the overwhelming task of tackling the ancient water infrastructure. Empathy began to replace anger, and students’ questions changed from “how could they?” to “how can WE make a difference?”

The project’s documentary style was organic as the students conducted the research. They developed questions they wished to ask and only then asked adult leaders for approval or input. As the project’s headquarters was a public library, research materials were easily obtained and accessed. As students interviewed the adults and asked well-phrased questions, those in the interviewing hot seat often physically changed their manners throughout the interview. As the students shared their own knowledge from prior conversations, or from their own scientific studies on the river, adult experts’ answers became more informative. In several instances, there was a
perceptual shift when those being interviewed realized that they were not in the company of an ill-informed student population. Conversations became livelier as students offered their knowledge and illustrated that they were backing their questions with well-done research.

Now in its second year, the Amsterdam Cultural Documentation project is in its final stages. As students have matured developmentally, they have matured in their abilities to empathize with others. They have also matured in their relationships with each other as they work together as a well-functioning team. A watershed moment occurred in this final year. Combing through hours of video footage, they sought the “adult” words that would express what they themselves knew. As they frantically named individuals and quoted statements, Youth FX leader Bhawin Suchak asked them to stop a minute and to formulate their own statements. The students realized that they themselves held the knowledge. That was a particularly empowering moment as student became expert. They had found their voice.

The connections that EST makes—between community and ecosystem, traditional folklife and landscape, culture and environment—provide an opportunity and a pathway for young people to forge an ethical relationship to land and community. Of primary importance to the Amsterdam EST students is the environmental degradation of the waterways and their growing feelings of stewardship for their place. Following Gruenewald, the students are re-inhabiting their community, learning to live well—socially and ecologically—in their “disrupted and injured” place. They are challenging each other, and the adults of the community, to “read the texts of their own lives and to ask what needs to be transformed and what needs to be conserved.” Through folklife and cultural documentation of their community, Amsterdam EST youth are drawing upon mentoring and intergenerational relationships with the adults in their lives. This in an act of ecojustice (Gruenewald 2003). In their pursuit of ecological awareness and literacy, the students have augmented their sense of place and defined their roles as active, informed, and engaged community members able to make a difference.
Ellen McHale holds a PhD in Folklore and Folklife from the University of Pennsylvania. Since 1999, she has served as the Executive Director of the New York Folklore Society, a statewide organization dedicated to the study, preservation, and promotion of New York’s traditional arts and culture. The professional collaboration between the New York Folklore Society and the Schoharie River Center, upon which this work is based, began in 2011 and continues to the present.

John McKeeby is Executive Director of the Schoharie River Center. He holds a Master’s in Developmental Psychology (Drexel University) and a post-Master’s Certificate in Structural Family Therapy from the Family Therapy and Training Center of the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Education. A co-founder (with Ellen McHale), of the Schoharie River Center, the EST program has twice been awarded the Seaworld/Busch Garden’s Environmental Excellence Award (2008 and 2011) and was awarded the New York State Department of Conservation’s Environmental Excellence Award in 2013.

URLs
My River, My Home film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fneT8uyC_dg

Works Cited
Semken, Steven and Carol Butler Freeman. 2008. Sense of Place in the Practice and Assessment of Place-Based Science Teaching. Science Education. 92.6: 1042-57.
Supporting Iñupiaq Arts and Education
by Sean Asiqłuq Topkok

My Iñupiaq name is Asiqłuq. My parents are (the late) Aileen and Clifford Sanguk Topkok (from Teller, Alaska). My grandmothers are (the late) Gussie Ahnakosok Topkok and Mary Tweet. My grandfathers are (the late) Fred Topkok and Edgar Tweet. I am a person of the Kauwerak from the Seward Peninsula.

(An authentic Iñupiatun introduction.)

My white fox name is Sean Topkok, and I prefer to be called Asiqłuq. The Iñupiat used to have only one name (Craig 1996). When Elders ask us our Iñupiaq name, they know our family tree just by that one name. When the missionaries and first teachers came and were documenting names, they wanted to include first and last names. Since Iñupiat usually had only one name, missionaries assigned another name. In many villages, for an Iñupiaq to get another name, missionaries required that person to be baptized. The price for a baptism was one white fox pelt. Hence, when one refers to an English name, it is also referred as a “white fox name.” I am Iñupiaq, Sámi, Irish, and Norwegian. My father was Iñupiaq and Sámi, and his first language was Iñupiatun (the Iñupiaq language). My mother was born and raised in Teller. My paternal grandfather, Fred Topkok, was a reindeer herder. I was born and raised in Spenard, Alaska. I am still learning the Iñupiaq and Sámi languages, and my family speaks English and Norwegian at home. My wife and I have three sons and currently one grandson. I am the fifteenth Iñupiat to earn a doctorate degree and currently am a faculty member in the School of Education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF).

The above personal introduction contains key elements for a cultural atlas, a way of documenting cultural heritage. The key elements in my introduction identify iñuk (myself as a person), ilagiiniq (family relations), nunaaggiq (village or community). This article is a case study of my active involvement in two university courses to collaborate with students and community members to
document their place and heritages; improve teacher retention by active involvement through course activities; and provide preservice teachers an opportunity to visit a remote Alaskan village and gain firsthand knowledge from first-year teacher experiences.

**Literature Review**

In contemporary times, the number of Indigenous scholars researching Indigenous and Western paradigms is increasing, critiquing how Western paradigms tend to be inadequate for Indigenous research and education in their current forms (Dunbar 2008, Jacobs 2008, Kovach 2009, Smith 1999, Topkok 2015, Wilson 2008). Through their initiative, other Indigenous communities worldwide are inspired to grow their own Indigenous scholars. The concept and process of “growing Indigenous scholars” coincide with Marie Battiste’s statement (2013): “Indigenous people are also moving beyond critiques to address the healing and wellness of themselves and their communities, to reshape their contexts and effect their situations, and to create reforms based on a complex arrangement of conscientization, resistance, and transformative action” (69). This theoretical framework connects the Indigenous researcher to existing generational knowledge and nurtures Indigenous scholars to identify their Indigenous knowledge as a valid source. Likewise, Western scientists recognize Indigenous knowledge as authentic: “Numerous authors have demonstrated the profound sense of awareness and place-based knowledge that traditional hunters and their communities have about the dynamic changes in their local environments (Robards et al. 2018).

When dealing with preservice and teaching education, cultural rigor should be taught at the same level as academic rigor. There is an increase of documenting Indigenous methodologies, incorporating Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and theoretical frameworks (Dunbar 2008, Jacobs 2008, Kovach 2009, Meyer 2001, Smith 1999, Topkok 2015, Wilson 2008). More papers and books are being written about Indigenous methodologies and cultural values by Indigenous scholars for upcoming Indigenous students. Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste (2002) writes: “As a concept, Indigenous knowledge benchmarks the limitations of Eurocentric theory–its methodology, evidence, and conclusions–reconceptualizes the resilience and self-reliance of Indigenous peoples, and underscores the importance of their own philosophies, heritages, and educational processes” (5). Indigenous theoretical frameworks are important because they offer an Indigenous perspective on research for academia. Our research with our Iñupiat cultural values resonate locally, nationally, and internationally for more Indigenous scholarly resources and will contribute to this growing literature.

**Margaret A. Cargill Foundation Funding**

Margaret A. Cargill Foundation (MACF) is a private foundation that came into existence upon the donor’s death in 2006 and focuses on several domains, including Native Arts and Culture. The MACF description notes that a “…focus in Native American and folk arts and cultures supports the intergenerational transference of artistic skill and knowledge, where skills and meaning are rooted in longstanding traditions defined by local communities of practice” (MACF n.d.). Each domain requires that three institutions collaborate: a university, a school district, and a nonprofit arts organization. MACF identifies one institution to take the lead and distributes allocated funds over several years.
In 2015, my UAF School of Education colleagues with the North Slope Borough School District (NSBSD) were asked to be collaborators for an invitation-only MACF multiyear grant. The purposes of the grant were to improve the quality of K-12 teachers in Alaska and the graduation rate of qualified students from high-quality preservice teacher programs in Alaska.

NSBSD took the lead for the Supporting Iñupiaq Arts and Education grant, and contacted the UAF School of Education to partner as the university collaborator. Cultural Elders and culture bearers were identified through the Alaska State Council on the Arts, the nonprofit collaborator. All the directives were implemented through the lead organization, the NSBSD, and agreements were formalized.

Under the agreement, the School of Education faculty collaborated with NSBSD in developing and delivering a course that meets Alaska Department of Education and Early Development requirements for three credits in multicultural education.

**Cultural Atlases as a Pedagogical Strategy**

I have successfully created a new catalog course, Cultural Atlases as a Pedagogical Strategy, which I taught as a Special Topics course in 2006. The NSBSD agreed that the course satisfies the above agreement, and it is recognized by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development as a multicultural endorsement, one of two requirements needed to teach in Alaska. The other required endorsement is Alaska history. It is now a catalog course. The course description is also a cultural atlas definition, which may be an electronic living document or a written document for future teachers. Ideally, communities will have the opportunity to build and define their own cultural heritage further through a cultural atlas.

The Cultural Atlas course is divided into six modules. Each takes two to three weeks to complete. The modules are Creating a Story, Family Tree Project, Interviewing Elders, Community History, Place Names, and Bringing It All Together. I based the course on an analogy from a Tlingit culture bearer who shared understanding one’s cultural heritage with me. He said a cultural heritage is like a forest. You have one single tree, yourself, which needs to be healthy and strong. The surrounding trees are your family members. The whole forest is your community (Topkok 2010). Students are encouraged to explore various Western and Indigenous methodologies to develop their local cultural atlas. The Cultural Atlas course is a method for communities and students to document their own cultural heritage. Students work with Elders, families, and community members to share their personal stories. They identify their genealogy, interview culture bearers, and archive their
community history. The students also identify place names, including Indigenous names of sea and landmarks before colonization.

The following are the modules I require of graduate students, who are usually teaching in rural Alaska, to first do for themselves (creating an example to show their students), and then to teach their students.

Module #1 (My Story). Your assignment for this module is to guide the student through a process in which you will develop a preliminary outline of what a story of your family might look like and then develop an outline of what the story of your community might look like. This is your own creation, so your family and community story should have its own unique quality. When the outline is complete, we will set up a website where you will begin to upload the information you have gathered as the first installment toward your “Cultural Atlas.”

In my introduction, I state who I am and who I am named after. This assignment allows K-12 students an opportunity to inquire how they were named, whether it be their Inupiaq name or their other name. Rachel Craig (2011) writes very helpfully about Inupiaq names. This applies to other groups, Native and non-Native, since we all have a story to share about who we are.

Module #2 (Family Tree). When you are gathering and inputting your data, be sure to include Native names where applicable, along with the origins and/or translation, kinship terms, and pictures or any multimedia available, all of which will be examined and critiqued as it relates to issues raised in the readings. Please include all information available—you can decide later what can and cannot be shared. When completed, your family tree will be added to your Cultural Atlas website, along with a journal in which you describe what you learned from the process.

Knowledge of one’s family tree is a cultural value in many Alaska Native groups. Kinship terms vary in Alaska. Yup’ik kinship depends on the gender of the person. This assignment allows K-12 students an opportunity to know who they are related to. I encourage students to utilize kinship terms from their heritage language. This is educational for Native and non-Native students, allowing them to get to know who their ancestors are.

Module #3 (Tea with Elders). Elders are our culture bearers. They hold deep-rooted knowledge about who we are and where we come from. Much can be learned from listening to an Elder, though it requires respect and patience. Therefore, you must do a chore for an Elder and commit to having tea or coffee with them. It is important to pay attention not only to what Elders say, but also when, where, and how they say it. When possible, tea should take place in the Elder’s home or a natural setting in the community. (The Aleut/Alutiiq Cultural Atlas provides an example of groups of Elders sharing their knowledge at [http://ankn.uaf.edu/CulturalAtlases](http://ankn.uaf.edu/CulturalAtlases).)

I have worked with many Elders statewide, nationwide, and internationally. There are many Elders who state they are tired of people coming to them just to gather information. Doing a chore and
having tea or coffee with an Elder establishes a relationship and trust. Often, spending time with an Elder creates an intimate relationship lasting a lifetime.

Module #4 (Community History). You should choose one of the examples from the readings (or develop a focus area of your own) and begin documenting information about the history of your community, including the contributions of plants and animals in the surrounding environment to the livelihood of the community. Your assignment is to prepare an initial compilation of community history information for a Cultural Atlas, keeping in mind that this can become more detailed and elaborated as an ongoing project in your school and community. (The Marshall Cultural Atlas is an example of this project, see http://ankn.uaf.edu/Resources/course/view.php?id=16.)

Module #5 (Place Names). Your task will be to develop an interactive multimedia map of your surroundings in which to document the place names of the local area. You should prepare a map and an initial compilation of place names for your area to be added to the local Cultural Atlas. (The Angoon and Kake Cultural Atlases are great examples of Place Names, see http://ankn.uaf.edu/CulturalAtlases.)

One year during this course, residents voted to change a North Slope village name from Barrow to its original place name Utqiagvik. Elders expressed a concern about community members getting lost and perishing. One solution they suggested is to emphasize teaching significant landmarks that have place names. In Figure 1, Celina Swerdfléger points to an old trading post built long before Western contact where Inupiat would gather to trade, dance, and tell stories.

Module #6 (Bringing It All Together). The final project to be completed over a period of three weeks is to consolidate your Cultural Atlas framework and
refine your website to upload and organize the information you have assembled. You should then prepare a how-to guide that you will present to the rest of the class incorporating the Cultural Atlas content and strategies you have developed and describing how you would put the academic, cultural, and technological skills you have learned to use in working with future students in your school.

Mapkuqput Iñuuniaġniġmi—Our Blanket of Life
In 2010, NSBSD adopted an Iñupiaq Learning Framework (ILF) called “Mapkuqput Iñuuniaġniġmi—Our Blanket of Life” (see Figure 2). Local educators and community members in the school district developed this framework and continue to add lessons and Iñupiaq assessments to meet cultural and academic rigor for their children. This Iñupiaq framework identifies knowledge and skills needed to be taught in their Iñupiaq curriculum based on Iñupiaq cultural values. They put each skill into four realms: Individual Realm, Community Realm, Environmental Realm, and Historical Realm. Each is tied and connected together with sinew, representing the Iñupiaq language and spirituality. The symbols on the blanket represent the North Slope Iñupiaq Cultural Values.

Figure 2: Mapkuqput Iñuuniaġniġmi—Our Blanket of Life.
Looking at the cultural atlas as a Pedagogical Strategy course and the ILF, one can see how the modules and realms complement each other (see Table 1). The NSBSD invited 25 first-year teachers to enroll in the Cultural Atlas course for this very reason. Since I am an Iñupiaq professor and familiar with the ILF, I could encourage the NSBSD first-year teachers to develop their school and community cultural atlases based on the ILF. Contemporary research shows teacher retention and attrition depend on how active teachers are in communities and how the educators teach through the culture (Kaden, Patterson, Healy, and Adams 2016).

Table 1. Modules and Realms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Atlas Modules</th>
<th>Iñupiaq Learning Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My Own Story</td>
<td>Individual Realm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Tree Project</td>
<td>Community Realm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewing Elders</td>
<td>Historical Realm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community History</td>
<td>Environmental Realm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place Names</td>
<td>Language and Spirituality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The NSBSD invited 24 new teachers to take the course. Of the 24 teachers, 11 initially enrolled. Because of various personal reasons, six withdrew. The remaining five passed the course. One teacher wrote in a journal entry:

But what has come now is a deeper understanding that the person sitting [or] standing right next to me, even one that looks like me, may have a completely different orientation to life, upbringing, and deep ancestral history. With that we begin the journey!

This demonstrates the impact the course had on just one student. Others stated that they would make their local cultural atlas a blog, a first-year teacher’s manual, and a video series. I encourage students to draw on their strengths to develop their own cultural atlases. One chose blogging (edited for anonymity):

One of those is my Cultural Atlas blog, created for this course. I had vast difficulty trying to upload documents and photographs to [a website] and so was advised to use my strengths in resolving the issue. My response was to create a blog specific for the course where I could post my completed assignments in a written and visual manner that I was greatly familiar with and which would allow both my professor and fellow students to read and view (additionally, as it is a public blog, random Google searchers may find themselves reading one or two of my posts) (personal communication).

This student flourished with their blog, uploading multiple photos of animals, the community, their classroom, and much more. They wrote about various experiences with community members and Elders.
Another student concluded a paper about Interviewing Elders (edited for anonymity) by writing:

In my short time living in the village, I have been fortunate enough to enjoy participating in both hunting and fishing. I will continue to enjoy the fishing and hunting in this vast Arctic paradise, calling upon my own expertise as a fisherman and what little experience I have as a new hunter. More importantly I will call upon the knowledge of the Elders and those in the community who possess a wealth of knowledge on both hunting and fishing, a deep and seemingly endless knowledge that enables them to live at the top of the world in a landscape whose extreme climate is contrasted by its extreme beauty (personal communication).

I have heard several stories about a new teacher arriving in remote Alaska, not stepping off the plane, and leaving the community. The above student’s experience shows interaction with Elders and community members, visiting the environment, and acknowledging the sense of place as extreme yet beautiful. This is not an isolated experience. Another student wrote (edited for anonymity):

[My partner] and I have a great relationship with this person [an Elder] already but speaking with her about this place and hearing her ideas that are not shared each day was a great experience. She shared with me a dream she had the night before we visited with her, where I showed up and asked if I could sleep there. She told me yes, that I could. It meant a lot to me that I ended up somewhere in her unconscious thoughts, as she is special to me, and [my partner] as well (personal communication).

Culture Camp

As requested by NSBSD, we solicited and brought a future teacher to one of the Culture Camps. Another class I teach is Alaska Native Education, a required course for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in Education degree program at UAF. I invited all the preservice teachers in my class to visit a remote village for a culture camp experience, paid through the MACF grant. (More preservice teachers were interested in attending, but schedule conflicts made it impossible.)

I was able to travel with one student, Celina Swerdfeger, to one of the NSBSD villages. We were welcomed by school personnel and introduced to the staff. We met with an Elder and the culture camp coordinator to go over the schedule for the two-day visit. There happened to be a potluck scheduled the evening we arrived, giving us an opportunity to meet community members, children, school staff, and borough personnel. We were lucky to meet the first female whaling captain, who successfully fed her community with the whale who gave itself to her. After the community potluck, my preservice student spent the rest of the evening visiting with first-year teachers. Celina and the first-year teachers were enthusiastic about talking with each other. The first-year teachers were sharing their experiences and asked if Celina was interested in teaching in the NSBSD. Celina was curious to experience more about the place. The following day, community members and the culture camp coordinator planned to take us and the first-year teachers on an hour-long snowmachine ride (some people refer to snowmobiles as snowmachines) out of the village to experience ice fishing.
There were several first-year teachers in this remote village. This was the first time for many to be on a snowmachine. Community members with snowmachines took all of us out of the village onto the frozen river. All snowmachines were pulling wooden sleds for riders and equipment. We went for a half an hour, warmed up, then continued to the mouth of the river. At the ice-fishing spot, nets were placed between two holes to catch *iqalusaat* (Least Cisco) fish. There were several nets set for us to pull out of the ice and take the *iqalusaat* out of the nets. At our last fishing spot, a *kayuqtuq* (fox) decided to pay us a visit. In Figure 3, you can see the preservice teacher bending down to take a photo and how the *kayuqtuq* did not show any fear but kept its distance. A community member tossed it an *iqalusaaq* as a gift. We then returned to the village, and the Elder and culture camp coordinator had to fly out that late afternoon. The preservice teacher and I left the following morning. My student stated this was an experience they will never forget and encouraged other students to visit a remote village if given the opportunity.

**Conclusion**

While the initial funded program is no longer being offered, it is clear that the participating first-year teachers built relationships with their communities by participating in the Cultural Atlas course and the culture camps. These opportunities provided firsthand experiences with preservice teachers in the Alaska Native Education course. I feel this was a great partnership and look forward to possibly working together in the future for Alaska’s education.

The NSBSD Iñupiat cultural values were observed when the first-year teachers and preservice teacher participated in the Supporting Iñupiaq Arts and Education project. In Table 2, the left column lists the NSBSD Iñupiat Cultural Values, while the right column shows how the cultural value was observed during this interactive experience.
Table 2. NSBSD Iñupiat Cultural Values and Interactive Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSBSD Iñupiat Cultural Values</th>
<th>Interactive Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Avanmun Ikayuutiniq</em> (Helping Each Other)</td>
<td>Students learn from each other while they actively participate in the classroom or at a culture camp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Avilaitqatigiigniq</em> (Friendships)</td>
<td>Students going through a cohort develop friendships that last a lifetime, encouraging each other to try new things, offer support, and maintain relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Iḷagiiñiq</em> (Family Relations/Roles)</td>
<td>Community members are actively involved and understand their various roles in the village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Iḷammiuģniq</em> (Creating Friends)</td>
<td>The culture camp allows an opportunity for preservice and current teachers to engage with community members and create relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Iglutuiguniq</em> (Endurance)</td>
<td>Cultural activities happen year-round. It takes perseverance to maintain a necessary subsistence lifestyle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ikayuqtigiigniq</em> (Cooperation)</td>
<td>Supporting Iñupiaq Arts and Education was a collaborative project involving community members, educators, culture bearers, and administrators to make it a positive experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irruaqligñaiññiq</em> (No Mockery)</td>
<td>Respect is highly valued for any cultural heritage. We do not mock people nor their knowledge systems and beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kipakkutaiññiq</em> (Respect for Human, Animals, Property, and Land)</td>
<td>During the culture camp, we did not disturb other fishing spots, looked out for each other’s safety, fed the <em>kayutuq</em>, and did not disturb the water, land, or air.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mitaallatuniq</em> (Sense of Humor)</td>
<td>Humor is a shared Alaska Native cultural value. Humor allows us to practice humility, knowing when we make a mistake we should not take it too personally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nagliktuutiqaañiq</em> (Compassion)</td>
<td>While the community members invited others to their fishing spot, <em>iqalusaat</em> was shared to show compassion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nakuaqqutiqaañiq</em> (Love)</td>
<td>An Elder expressed to me, “Everything we do, we should do it with love.” Love is reciprocal, which is a universal cultural value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Piḷḷaktautaiññiq</em> (Gentleness)</td>
<td>As we were taking the <em>iqalusaat</em> out of the nets, we did so gently to show respect to the animal spirits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students work with their communities to determine whether to share their cultural atlases with the public, depending on the cultural and intellectual property rights that communities have established. There are some examples of shared cultural atlases available at the Alaska Native Knowledge Network website (http://ankn.uaf.edu/NPE/oral.html). Some communities elected to share but want the general public to agree to the Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge, making the cultural atlases password-protected.

One of my students from the Alaska Native Education course earned her teaching certificate and wrote about her experience in rural Alaska:

"Anybody who has taken a course with Dr. Topkok knows that he has a passion for education, especially for the underserved Alaska Native populations across the state. He has a profound ability to advocate for the Alaska Native populations in both a powerful and respectful way. His course had a great impact on me as an educator considering a teaching career in rural Alaska. He was a great role model for the type of relationship teachers can have across cultural lines and the collaboration that can occur to improve the quality of education for students. When teachers new to the state ask me about the mandatory Alaska Native Education course, I always recommend they look to the UAF for a course with him (personal communication)."

I continue to teach the Cultural Atlas as a Pedagogical Strategy and Alaska Native Education courses. I share the Supporting Iñupiaq Arts and Education experience with all my students, letting them know of the positive collaboration, and allowing a glimpse into the benefits of working with community members, Elders, seasoned educators, and with other classmates.

“*Uvaŋa atiґa Asiqluq. Aapaga Sanguk. Aanaga Aileen-mi. My Iñupiaq name is Asiqluq. My white-fox name is Sean Topkok. I am Iñupiaq, Sámi, Irish, and Norwegian.*” Topkok is Assistant Professor at the School of Education in the graduate programs. His family is from Teller, Alaska,
and is Qaviaraġmiu. His research interests include multicultural and Indigenous education, decolonization and Indigenist methods and methodologies, working with communities to help them document their cultural heritages, and community well-being.

Endnotes
1. ‘Iñupiaq’ is singular or an adjective. ‘Iñupiat’ is three or more.
2. See http://ankn.uaf.edu/SOP/SOPv4i2.html#yupik.
3. For more about the Iñupiaq Learning Framework see https://www.nsbsd.org/Page/4542.
4. Table is found at http://ankn.uaf.edu/ANCR/Values/inupiaq.html.

Works Cited
2019 Journal of Folklore and Education: Call for Submissions

The *Journal of Folklore and Education* is a peer-reviewed, multimedia, open-access journal published annually by Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education. Local Learning links folk culture specialists and educators around the world, advocating for inclusion of folk and traditional arts and culture in education. We believe that "local learning"—the traditional knowledge and processes of learning that are grounded in community life—is of critical importance to the effective education of students and to the vigor of our communities and society.

JFE publishes work representing ethnographic approaches that tap the knowledge and life experience of students, their families, community members, and educators in K-16, higher education, museum, and community education. We intend our audience to be educators and students at all levels and in all settings, folk culture specialists, and those working in community-based organizations. As a digital publication, the *Journal of Folklore and Education* provides a forum for interdisciplinary, multimedia approaches to community-based teaching, learning, and cultural stewardship. It is found at www.locallearningnetwork.org.

The 2019 theme is The Art of the Interview. Interviewing is a core methodology in the field of folklore and a technique often used in K-16 education. Folk arts interviews teach important details about cultural context, artistic expression as communication, and the ways stories can help us better understand our communities. The practice of interviewing integrates well with many K-16 curricular areas and education standards so that art and culture can be embedded in additional subject areas. Providing specific curricular examples of interviewing for folk arts education will expand educators’ options when using interviewing as a learning tool.

This JFE special issue will include work that illustrates HOW to do an interview, WHY to use interviews as a part of one’s curriculum, and WHAT can be done with completed interviews.

**Essential questions that contributors may use to inspire their writing include the following:**

~ How can one best prepare artists, students, and others for interviewing? How can you design an interview project for desired student understanding?
~ How might interviewing with an attention to local knowledge enhance other inquiry-based research models being used in learning spaces?
~ How can the tools of folklore such as observation, identifying important traditions and rituals, and collecting personal experience narratives through interviews create opportunities for addressing significant social questions? ~ What role can emergent and interactive ethnography play in educational settings? How has digital technology impacted the outcome and approach to interviewing?
~ How may interviews be integrated with the arts, be seen as art themselves, or become a part of constructing the idea of who may be an “artist”?
~ How can educators from multiple disciplinary areas, including science, social studies, composition, or literacy use interview practices in their teaching?
~ How does a folkloristic, ethnographic approach to working with learners in a classroom or community setting connect them with cultural knowledge systems different from their own and deepen their understanding of their own places?
~ How can university teacher-preparation programs include ethnography as a key part of their pedagogy?
~ How can the field of folklore help address “tough conversations” or controversy found in contemporary discourse surrounding the education achievement gap or structural racism of schools and their communities? How might this help us serve learners with diverse perspectives in our classrooms?

More about Submissions: We seek submissions of articles, model projects, multimedia products, teaching applications, and student work accompanied by critical writing that connects to the larger frameworks of this theme. We particularly welcome submissions inclusive of perspectives and voices from represented communities. Co-authored articles that include teachers, administrators, artists, or community members offer opportunities for multiple points of view on an educational program or a curriculum. We publish articles that share best practices, offer specific guides or plans for implementing folklore in education, and articulate theoretical and critical frameworks. We invite educators to share shorter pieces for “Notes from the Field.” Nontraditional formats are also welcomed, such as lesson plans, worksheets, and classroom exercises. Media submissions, including short film and audio clips, will also be considered. We highly recommend reviewing previous issues of JFE (see www.locallearningnetwork.org/journal-of-folklore-and-education/current-and-past-issues). Be in touch with the editors to learn more and see whether your concept might be a good fit.

Research-based writing that theorizes, evaluates, or assesses programs that use folklore in education tools and practice are also welcomed. These research articles may intersect with the theme “The Art of the Interview,” but all submissions with a research component will be considered. We expect that research projects will have appropriate institutional permissions for public dissemination before submission to JFE, including approval from Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and/or data licensing for the acquisition of existing data, as may be required. See the protocol for publishing a study used by ArtsEdSearch for guidance.

Format: Articles should be 1,500-4,500 words, submitted as a Word document. We use a modified Chicago style (not APA) and parenthetical citations. All URL links hyperlinked in the document should also be referenced, in order, at the end of the article in a URL list for offline readers. Images should have a dpi of at least 300. Be in touch with the editors to discuss submission and media ideas and to learn formatting, technical specifications, and our citation style template.

Contact editors Paddy Bowman at pbbowman@gmail.com or Lisa Rathje at rathje.lisa@gmail.com with ideas for stories, features, lessons, and media productions. You may also request a citation style template. Initial drafts of submissions are due April 15, 2019.

Please share this announcement with colleagues and educators in your community. This endeavor is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts.
The Journal of Folklore and Education is a publication of Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education

Local Learning connects folklorists, artists, and educators across the nation and advocates for the full inclusion of folklife and folk arts in education to transform learning, build intercultural understanding, and create stronger communities.

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The Art of the Interview
Journal of Folklore and Education Volume 6 will be published in September, 2019
Our advisory committee for Volume 6 issue includes:

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About the Editors

Paddy Bowman is Founding Director of Local Learning and creator of numerous folklore and education resources. She co-edited Through the Schoolhouse Door: Folklore, Community, Curriculum (2011) and co-wrote a chapter in Folklife and Museums. She was awarded the 2013 American Folklore Society Benjamin A. Botkin Prize for Lifetime Achievement in Public Folklore and in 2016 was named a Fellow of the American Folklore Society. Reach her at pbbowman@gmail.com.

Tim Frandy is Assistant Professor of Folk Studies at Western Kentucky University. His research involves folklore and environments, the medical humanities, cultural worldview, informal economy, and cultural sustainability. He has worked with subsistence hunters, trappers, fishers, wild-ricers, berry pickers, traditional healers, bushcrafters, and traditional artists in northern Indigenous and settler communities.

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