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LOUISIANA
CHILDREN'S
MUSEUM

Family Folklife Day

Swapping Stories to Connect, Preserve and Protect Community in New Orleans

Explore Your Own Family Folklife!

What is Folklife?

- You may think of rural areas, or historic ways of life, but “folklife” refers to the shared ways-of-being of any “folk group,” and we all belong to several!
- Folk traditions are “alive,” meaning they continue and evolve with the people who live in each culture. They are simply done today as well as done in the past.
- These practices can also change from generation to generation, because folklife is alive!
- If you continue the conversation with elders in your folk group, you can gather some **perspective**, or an understanding of why people started doing things a certain way, and why things may change depending on the moment in time that each generation is living through.
- You may hear similar terms being used to refer to folklife: “folklore,” “folk culture,” or “traditional culture.”
- They refer to traditions that we learn from people we know. We learn them in an **informal** way (as opposed to learning something in school) from groups that we are a part of.
- They can include things like traditional stories, songs, customs, activities, objects, foods, and beliefs that people continue to pass along and identify with the group.

What is a Folk Group?

- A **folk group** is where folklife happens! They are communities that share **traditions**. You can belong to several groups at once.
- Your family is your first folk group. It is the source of where you learn to view the world and your place in it.
- Your school, your neighborhood, your town or city, your state, your workplace, religious community etc. are examples of folk groups.

Why Should we Notice, Document and Share our Folk Culture?

- When we connect and learn about each other, we can celebrate our incredible **diversity** as well as strengthen the **identity** and **connection** in our own families and communities.
- Recognizing and sharing our cultures allows us to not only feel **belonging** within our groups, but it helps connect us to others.
- Some things may be obvious and celebrated, but more subtle aspects like phrases and daily practices in the home could go unrecognized as unique or worth celebrating.
- Sometimes, when you're living in a culture, it's hard to notice the unique aspects of it until you learn about how other cultures may do things a little differently.

Collect Your Family Stories!

- We know storytelling is important, and no one can tell your story but **you!** That makes you the expert of telling your own story.
- Older family, neighbors and friends have done and seen a lot and their memories are priceless libraries of history and insight.
- It's also important to document special memories and milestones of your own!
- Think about what goals you have when it comes to stories you hope to collect.
- Choose your storyteller to interview. Be **respectful** of topics that may bring up big feelings.
- Ask the **journalistic questions** of "Who?, What?, When?, Where?, Why? and How?" when you want to go a little deeper in your understanding. Be curious and open.
- Thank your storyteller for sharing their memories with you! Let them know that you will keep the stories safe. An important part of collecting stories is knowing you have a responsibility to take good care of them, just like a Library or Museum takes care of the special things in their **collections**.



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Make a Family Folklife Scrapbook at Home!



A Scrapbook is a method of preserving and presenting your own or your family's history. Usually, it starts as a sturdy book with blank pages that you can fill in as you go, like a journal. It is a great way to collect stories, writings, drawings, memorabilia, photographs etc. in one place to tell your family's stories. Instead of purchasing an empty scrapbook, you could try making one at home together as a fun project! That way you can design it however you like and use materials you may have around the house.

For a basic cardboard scrapbook like the ones above, you will need:

1. **Cardboard** – Cut matching size rectangles from a cardboard box. You can make this whatever size you like, considering what you will be putting inside. With the cardboard we had, we were able to make the covers 12in x 10 in.
2. **Pages** – We had some larger sized sheets of construction paper, so we cut them to the size of the covers and stacked them to go between the two cardboard covers. It's nice to have a blank page to work with, but you could use any paper you find, and layer/collage on top. Use your creativity and use what you have!
3. **Hole Punch** – We used a 3-Hole punch to punch each cover, and then the pages. You can also use a single hole punch or get a grown up to help make holes in the paper. Make sure the holes are lined up through all the pages and cover, so you can bind the book together.
4. **Yarn** – We used yarn to bind the book – basically sewing and tying the book in place! You can go through each hole with three separate pieces, or you can use one long string and sew in and out of all the holes and tie with some nice double knots, so the book is sturdy.
5. **Decorate** – You can use anything you want to create your scrapbook. We used construction paper, scissors, glue, and pencils! You can collage with different papers, add photos or photocopies, or just make drawings of the things you want to include.
6. **Family Folklife Questions** – There are lots of resources online to give you some ideas about what kind of topics you might want to document in your scrapbook. You can start by using a few of the Family Folklife Questions that we share on the next page of this document. You can also let your inner curiosity guide you. You may have some favorite things you like to do; well, what did your parents or grandparents like to do when they were your age? How were things different, or the same?

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Family Folklife Questions

Swapping Stories to Connect, Preserve and Protect Community in New Orleans

Below are some questions to get us started thinking about the folklore of our groups of origin. Feel free to browse them and choose a question or two that you would like to think about or ask to a family member or someone you know in your community. We have arranged the questions to relate to the **Impact Areas** in our Education Department at LCM. Which questions from each group are you most curious about? Can you think of other things you are curious to know about the folk life of your family or community?

Activity inspired by [4-H FOLKPATTERNS](#) Family Folklore

Arts and Culture

- Is there a cultural group that you and/or your folk group of origin identify with? (ex. New Orleanian, Creole, Saints Fans etc.)
- Is there a special skill or craft that you were taught or hope to learn from a family member?
- What music, songs, or musical instruments does your family enjoy?
- How do you keep the culture of your folk groups of origin alive? Do you value keeping the traditions you were born into, or do you try to pave your own way?
- Think of a holiday you celebrate with your family or community. What preparations would you make sure to take to get ready? What foods are there? What things are different from when you were younger?

Sustainability

- In what ways did you spend time in nature as a child? Was it part of your family's regular routine?
- What are some things you learned to notice and mark the changing seasons?
- What stories were you told about the land you lived on or the place you lived?
- What was your relationship to water in the environment growing up?

Health and Wellness

- What is the first meal or snack you remember preparing for yourself as a child?
- How did you learn about cooking?
- What is an early memory you have of learning to make a “special recipe” - either passed down or something important to you as a child?
- Were there any foods that you ate as a child that were normal in your family group but considered “weird” by other kids?
- What do you do to get well when you have a cold or are feeling under the weather? What are your first go-to remedies?

Early Learning

- What is an early memory you have of reading or listening to stories from a family member or caretaker?
- What is a song or rhyme you remember learning as a child?
- Did you have any beliefs or fears when you were a child that you no longer believe in or fear?
- Do you know the story of your name or nickname?

Also

- Describe a keepsake that you hold on to that you would consider an “heirloom.”
- If you are living somewhere different from where you grew up, what are some things that have made you feel “at home” in a new place?
- What are some things that you are “homesick” for?
- If your family has a collection of family photos, stories, or records, who is the caretaker of this information? How do they share, conserve, or interpret these materials?
- Do you have a family storyteller?

Other Resources:

There are many wonderful resources out there where you can learn more about collecting stories. We thought we would share a few that have been very inspiring to us at LCM!

- [Louisiana Folklife Program](#)
- [Louisiana Voices Homepage](#)
- <https://www.neighborhoodstoryproject.org/>
- <https://www.beloudstudios.org/>

- [4-H Folkpatterns Project – Family Folklore](#)
- [Discover StoryCorps – StoryCorps](#)
- <https://www.foxfire.org/education/educator-resources/>
- [About this Reading Room | American Folklife Center | Research Centers | Library of Congress \(loc.gov\)](#)
- [Local Learning : The National Network For Folk Arts in Education \(locallearningnetwork.org\)](#)