

Table of Contents

I. Introduction	3
II. Community Research	4
Community Research? What's That?	4
Meet the Community Researchers	4
Curiosity	6
Who Are You and What Are You Curious About?	6
Matching a Topic to your Curiosity	8
Matching Your Curiosity to a School Subject	9
III. Before You Interview	9
How to Find a Tradition Bearer	9
What Will You Ask?	10
Equipment Check	11
IV. Interviewing Skills in Motion	13
Setting Up the Interview	13
Ready, Set, Go!	14
Establishing Rapport	14
Setting the Stage	14
Questions and Answers	15
Other Interview Problems	16
Auxiliary Information	18
A Big Thank You	18
V. What Do I Do with It Now?	19
To Log or Transcribe?	19
Follow-up Questions and Further Research	20
VI. Bring On the Analytical Power!	21
A Word on Ethics in Collecting	22
Ideas on Presenting Your Information	23
An Exhibition	24
A Performance or Demonstration	25
More Project Ideas!	26
It's Fun to Do More Than One	27
What to Do with a Collection	28
Speaking of Your Teacher...	29
VII. Appendices	30

I. Introduction

You are about to learn about the work of five community researchers – students, like yourself, who wanted to know more about their communities than they could learn from a book.

How did they do it?

First, they learned about community research. They found out that they knew people in their communities who could answer the questions they had about topics like music, crafts, cooking, public speaking, and farming. They discovered that by asking these people good questions, they could get the type of information they were seeking.

They practiced their interviewing skills. They found out what they could about the topics they were curious about by reading information in libraries and on the Internet.

Then they used tape recorders and cameras to gather information.

They used all this information in their classwork in subjects as varied as language arts, social studies, math, science, the arts, and home economics.

They did it. You can do it, too. Watch the video, read this guide carefully, and you, too, can be a successful community researcher.

Good luck, and we hope you have fun learning about...



Community Research? What's That?

What's the connection between blues music and soul-food cooking?

How does a quilter figure out the amount of fabric she needs for a quilt?

When should a preacher pause for his congregation to say "amen"?

These are some of the thought-provoking questions that five young Mississippi Delta researchers asked people in their communities.

Why Did They Ask These Questions?

BECAUSE they wanted to go right to a source of information in their community to get answers.

BECAUSE they could learn more about the topics they were interested in from people than from books.

BECAUSE the community research they did could be used in just about any school subject they wanted to know more about.

Who Are These Researchers and Why Should You Be Interested in Their Work?

BECAUSE they're kids just like you, and they found out that community research is interesting and fun.

Meet the Community Researchers

"My name is **Steven Richardson**, and I live in Coahoma, Mississippi, about 10 miles from Arkansas. There's not anything like the country life. It's just the best place. It's easygoing."



Steven is an eighth-grade student at Coahoma County Junior High School. At school, he's an office monitor. At his church, New Covenant Missionary Baptist Church, he's in the youth choir. Steven wants to go to college to become a corporate lawyer.



"My name is **Sasha Lenoir**. I live in Greenville, Mississippi. My favorite things to do are to play with children, read books, go to the mall, play my instrument, and watch TV."

Sasha is a seventh-grade student at Solomon Junior High School in Greenville. She is active in the school band and school activities.

"My name is **LaBeth Brown**. I live in Indianola, Mississippi. I play basketball, and I'm a cheerleader and do gymnastics."



LaBeth is an eighth-grade student at Indianola Academy. Through church she recently went to Honduras as a missionary.



"I'm **Laura Grace Tinsley**, and I live in Clarksdale, Mississippi, toward the northern part of the state. My church is Oakridge Baptist Church, where my father is a music minister. We have a youth choir, and I really enjoy it here."

Laura is an eighth-grade student at Oakhurst Junior High. She's very active in her church youth Bible study group and in other church activities. She also plays the piano and sings.

"I'm **Ashley Harris**. My favorite subject in school is really math. I like to play most every sport. Anything dealing with a ball, basically."



Ashley is a seventh-grade student at Leland Middle School in Leland, Mississippi. She likes to act in plays and to sing, and is involved in her church. Recently, her little brother graduated from Head Start.

So, how did they change from ordinary kids into Community Researchers?

They used **Curiosity, Interviewing Skills, and Analytical Power!**

Curiosity

Who Are You and What Are You Curious About?

Before you start out on your own community research quest, think about yourself and your own interests.

You can use the Who Am I? form in Appendix A to think about:

Where you come from...

What school subjects you are most interested in...

What you are curious about in your community...

This exercise will help you think about your own life, community and interests, in preparation for your community research.

The five researchers were curious about their communities and some special people in them. They needed answers, and these were the people they got them from! Let's see how three of the researchers found the people they interviewed:

Ashley Harris lives around the corner from blues singer Eddie Cusic and his wife Lucinda, who is a great soul-food cook.



Ashley: "I can't wait to go over to their house. There is no doubt that the real cooks and the real blues singers can help me even more than a book."

LaBeth Brown's grandfather Turner Arant is a catfish farmer.

LaBeth: "I've always wanted to do something like this 'cause I live around catfish. In science we just finished learning about the pH of the water in the catfish ponds."



Steven Richardson is interested in the preaching style of his pastor, Reverend Marvin Keith Myles.

Steven: "First I'm going to the library and do some research on the religious traditions around the Delta. I'm going to compare it with the things I already know about preaching and just explode it. I've been listening to the message, and this time I'm going to listen to how [Reverend Myles] brings the message."



Reverend Myles, Eddie and Lucinda Cusic, and Turner Arant are just the people to satisfy the researchers' curious minds. Each of these people has years of experience. Most of them learned their skills from someone else when they were young.

We call these people **Tradition Bearers**.

What does this mean, exactly?

- A **tradition** is something that has been passed down from person to person: for example, the knowledge of playing old songs on the guitar, the craft of quilting or crocheting, or the practice of always having a certain meal for a holiday.
- A **bearer** is someone who carries something on, and often passes it to someone else who is interested in having it. In this case, the "something" is traditional knowledge.

Like Reverend Myles, Turner Arant, and Mr. and Mrs. Cusic, most tradition bearers are ready and willing to pass on the community knowledge they have to a curious researcher!



MORE DEFINITIONS (JUST A COUPLE):

Learning about people's traditional skills and knowledge is often called **folklore** or **folklife research**. Talking to people about their own personal histories and experiences is often called **oral history research**.

If you are interested in learning more about folklore and oral history, your teacher has a list of resources to check out. Some are on the Internet; some are available through libraries.

To keep it simple in this guide, we'll stick to the term **COMMUNITY RESEARCH**. In this guide and in the video, the term **community research** best describes the type of information gathered by the students, and the method they used to get it.

- **Community:** Where you live, go to school, worship, have family, call "home." The people who live there (your neighbors, friends, relatives, classmates, fellow club members, etc.) are all part of that community.
- **Research:** A method of finding something out by gathering as much information as possible.

Okay, let's get on with it!

Matching a Topic to Your Curiosity

You're studying Asian cultures in social studies. What about Chinese culture right here in the Delta, and how it has blended with American Southern culture? Whom would you ask? What would you ask them?

Laura Grace Tinsley knew just whom to ask. Mrs. Chow is her home economics teacher and a member of her church. The Chow family are of Chinese descent but have lived in the Mississippi Delta since 1912.

Laura: "We've been over to [Mrs. Chow's] brother's before when they've cooked Chinese. They cook it for a gathering. It's very good."



What are you curious about?

Music? Food? Local occupations? Crafts?
Community history?

Matching Your Curiosity to a School Subject

Community research can help you in just about any subject in school.

Notice that, in their interviews, the kids found out about:

-  The science of catfish farming...
-  The mathematics of quilting...
-  The history of Chinese culture in the Delta...
-  The language arts behind preaching and blues music...
-  The home economics of cooking soul food...

AND they had fun doing it!

Possibly, this time around, you're doing community research for a particular subject because your teacher is assigning it. But, in the future, think about ways to use community research in other subjects. It could liven up your whole education!

Like Steven, many community researchers begin by reading more about the subject they're interested in at the library, on the Internet, or by visiting a museum or archive.



HANDY DEFINITION:

Archive: A place where documents, letters, diaries, photos, recordings, and other information are stored and can be used by researchers with special permission.

Books, pamphlets, exhibitions, photographs, maps, documents – any or all of these can help give you some background on your subject before you go on an interview. Knowing more can help you ask better questions. And, speaking of questions...

How to Find a Tradition Bearer

So, how are you going to find someone to interview to satisfy your curiosity?

Like the researchers in the video, you may already know someone: a friend of your parents, a neighbor, someone at your church, a person who works at your school. But what if you don't?

III. Before You Interview

Say you want to find a quilter and you have no clues. Here are some ideas:

- Ask your home economics teacher.
- Ask at a fabric or craft store.
- Find out if your county has a Home Extension Agent who works with people interested in home crafts (often including quilting). You can find this out by looking in the county government section of your local phone book. Call the agent up and ask her or him if she knows of any good quilters or quilting groups in your county.

The best way to find people is by asking other people. Chances are, you know someone who knows just the person you're looking for!



REMEMBER: Always get permission from your parents or guardians to call and/or work with a particular tradition bearer.

What Will You Ask?

Laura's mom and dad helped her think of some questions to ask the Chows. They discussed their ideas sitting around the kitchen table.

Laura's mom: What are you going to start with? Who came first?

Laura: I was going to ask her what it was like being here and growing up in the Mississippi Delta.

Laura's dad: She has family members in other places. Find out what they did. And just begin to draw it in....



Making a list of questions to ask the tradition bearer is a good place to start. Let's examine some questions Ashley prepared to ask Eddie Cusic about playing blues music.



When are the times when you play the blues, when you're happy, when you're feeling down?

When did you know you wanted to be a blues player?

Did your parents approve of you playing the blues?

Did you teach your children to play the blues?

Why did you stop playing the blues for 25 years? How did it feel?

Did you meet your wife at a place you were playing?

Can you think of any other questions Ashley could have asked? What would you want to know about blues music?

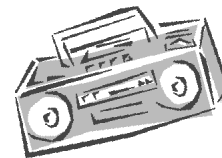


REMEMBER: These folks are not reference librarians. Ask them interesting questions about their traditions that you think they will be able to answer. Your list is just a rough outline of what you might ask. It's there to keep you on track.

Equipment Check

Before you go out there to satisfy your curiosity, you'll need some equipment.

Tape Recorder



LaBeth to her grandfather: Is it okay if I record this?

Turner Arant: It's perfectly fine with me.



The community researchers used a tape recorder (one that actually records voices, not just plays back) for their interviews. Before they did their interviews, they practiced to make sure they knew the proper way to use the recorder and to get the best sound

possible. You should, too! For advice on using a tape recorder for interviews, see Appendix B.

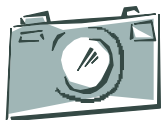
What if someone says “no” to recording? Try to convince them that a recording is much more accurate than just taking notes. But, if they continue to refuse, you’ll have to do your best taking notes on everything they say.

What if you absolutely cannot get a tape recorder? Again, taking notes is an alternative. You won’t be able to get every word, but at least you will get most.

Camera



Sasha: What kind of quilt pattern is this, Mrs. Taylor?



Mrs. Taylor: This is a monkey wrench.

Sasha: May I take a picture of it?

The community researchers took photos of the tradition bearers they interviewed. Photos are a great way to record visual information while doing community research.

The kids in the video borrowed some 35 mm cameras with adjustable settings and flashes. But what if all you have is that little camera you got in your Christmas stocking when you were seven years old, or, worse, no camera at all? Talk to your teacher about the possibility of borrowing a camera, or bring along a friend who has one. (If your friend has a video camera, all the better!)

Some visual record of your interview is important. If you absolutely cannot get a camera, sketch a picture!

For more information on taking pictures, see Appendix B.



GOOD IDEA: While you’re taking pictures, make a list of the shots. Jotting down some notes about the pictures you’re taking will help you identify the photos later after they are developed. See Appendix F to organize your list by using a Photo Log Form.

Setting Up the Interview

Got your tradition bearer, got your equipment, now you’re all ready. You just have to set up the interview. The easiest way is probably by calling the person on the phone.



LaBeth: Hey, Pa-Paw, this is LaBeth. How’re you? Good. I’m doing a science project on catfish farming, and I kinda decided to call you since you know so much about it. Can I interview you on the catfish farm?

LaBeth has known her grandfather for a long time, and of course he couldn’t say no to his granddaughter! But then most tradition bearers are very willing to help out with student projects.

Be clear about your what you want and why you are carrying out the community research project.

Steven: Well, Reverend Myles, I’ve been working on a cultural project in my social studies class and I decided to do it on oral traditions and preaching.



Sometimes, if you don’t know a person well, you should plan a preliminary visit before you actually do the interview. That’s up to you. Consider things like how far away you live from the person and how much time you both have to spare.

How long should an interview take? Find out ahead of time how long the person you’re interviewing has available to talk to you. Two hours is a good average length of time to figure on.



REMEMBER: Don’t rush an interview, but be mindful that you don’t overtire the tradition bearer! It’s better to do a follow-up interview than to continue talking to someone who is tired or restless.

Ready, Set, Go!

Okay, so you are all ready to go on your interview. Here are a few more pointers to a successful curiosity-satisfying experience.

Establishing Rapport

Rapport is a special feeling of comfort and connectedness between you and the person you're interviewing. The researchers in the video seemed to have a good rapport with their tradition bearers – even Sasha, who didn't know Mrs. Taylor very well before.

How do you get good rapport with someone you're planning to interview? It helps to spend a little time getting to know the person. Before confronting them with a tape recorder, take time to talk to them about their family, their life, their interests. Make sure they know how much you respect their knowledge and skills.



REMEMBER, if you're feeling nervous, the person you're interviewing may be just as nervous!

Setting the Stage

Take note of the interviews you see in the video, such as Ashley's interviews with Eddie and Lucinda Cusic.

Where are the interviews taking place? What are the background noises, who else is in the room, where is the interviewer sitting in relation to the person being interviewed? Is the person smoking or eating or doing something else that would affect their voice? Is there a parrot squawking or a dog barking? Does the air conditioner go off and on? Does the person being interviewed seem very tired, happy, sad, nervous?

All of the details surrounding an interview are called the **context** of the interview. You are there. Anyone else listening to or reading about your interview won't be. It's important to note as many details of the context of the interview as possible. This will help you, and anyone else interested in your interview, get a clearer picture of the interview in the future.

You will also want to record some **vital statistics** about the person you're interviewing. Full name, address, phone number, date of birth, birthplace, etc., are all valuable to have on hand.

In Appendix C you will find a form called an Interview Report Form. This form is helpful in recording the context of your interview.

Questions and Answers

You have your list of questions. You're anxious to satisfy that curiosity. What could possibly go wrong?

Check out the following interview problem.

Who's Interviewing Whom?

Tom the researcher: So, I understand you learned to sing from your parents, and they learned to sing from their parents. And you sing all the songs that they used to sing.

Person Tom is interviewing: Uh-huh.

Tom: And that you began to sing in 1950, and your favorite song is "Lay My Burden Down," and you sang it at the White House in 1963.

Person: Uh-huh.

Who's doing all the talking? How could you change the questions so that the person being interviewed has more room to answer?

Now let's look at an actual transcript of part of the interview LaBeth did with her grandfather:



LaBeth: How did you get involved in catfish farming?

Turner Arant: Well, many years ago, in 1962 to be exact, I was interested in buying a catfish farm simply to have fun fishing in. So, because I was in the rice business growing rice and I had available water, I decided to build a 20-acre lake.





LaBeth: What do you feed the fish?

Turner Arant: We feed them a balanced diet. It's high protein, approximately 29-32% protein.

LaBeth: How big do the catfish get before you sell them?

Turner Arant: Well, it takes one year to grow them from the egg to a six-inch fingerling. Then we move a six-inch fingerling into a grow-out pond, usually in March of the following year. And by November we have a pound-and-a-half to a two-pound fish.



What do you think is good about LaBeth's interview style? How did she draw out good answers from her grandfather? What is different about her interview style from "Tom's" imaginary interview above?

Would you have asked anything differently if you were interviewing Turner Arant?

Other Interview Problems

The "Runaway" Interview

SAMPLE PROBLEM: You're interested in Mrs. Smith's quilting, but she is only interested in telling you about her pet Pekinese dog and her grandchildren.

SOLUTION: Gently, and carefully, steer the questions back to the topic at hand. Something like, "Gee, Mrs. Smith, your dog is really cute and your grandchildren are SO talented. But I think your quilts are beautiful. What is this one called? When did you make it?"

The "You Already Know Too Much" Interview

SAMPLE PROBLEM: You know this person really well. So, they assume that you don't need to hear about things that you already know, like when they were born, or how they learned a folk art.

SAMPLE SOLUTION:

Grandma: Well, Mary, you already know all about how our family started the grocery store, so I don't have to tell you about that.

Mary (wrong answer): Yeah, Grandma, I've heard that story about a million times already.

Mary (right answer): Oh, Grandma, I have heard that story before, but I really need to get you to tell it to me again for my report. Besides, I think you remember different things every time you tell it!

The "I Have No Idea What You're Talking About" Interview

SAMPLE PROBLEM: You are interviewing a person who has a lot of knowledge about something you know very little about. Okay, so you read up on it at the library a bit, but you still don't really understand it too well.

SOLUTION: Be sure that you ask the person to explain things as clearly as possible. If they say, "And then I take the frimfram and place it into the froofroo," and you wouldn't know a frimfram from a froofroo if it bit you on the arm – ask! "Excuse me, Mr. Jones," you might say, "but could you show me what a frimfram looks like? And, maybe demonstrate how it goes into the froofroo?"



Clue: A photo or a sketch of what someone's talking about might help.

The last example is so important because some of the things older tradition bearers tell you about may be things that are rare or don't exist any longer: a house that burned down, a song that no one except the tradition bearer remembers, a way of fixing a piece of farm equipment that farmers don't use anymore. Your interview may be one of the few ways that a tradition bearer has of passing this information on for the future.

A NOTE ON “PROPS”: In many cases, it’s a good idea to have some items on hand that the tradition bearer can refer to. Photos are great. Tools, a musical instrument, a finished craft are all great, too. As you watch the video, notice the items that the tradition bearers refer to while they are being interviewed.



REMEMBER: Everyone’s bound to make some mistakes in asking questions. You might ask a question that is too personal, or a question that the person will be embarrassed by because he or she doesn’t know the answer. But if you keep your questions to the point, keep the interview on course, and make sure you understand the answers, you’ll do well.

Auxiliary Information

Along with your interview, you might want to ask the tradition bearer about other information that would help you satisfy your curiosity, above and beyond the “props” mentioned above. Sasha looked at many of Mrs. Taylor’s quilts. Steven attended Reverend Myles’s church services. The Cusics showed Ashley family photos. Laura talked to some of the other members of the Chow family.

Keep your eyes and ears open for other clues and opportunities to understand the tradition bearer better. Your interview will be all the better for this extra curiosity!

Here are some things to look for and ask about:

old photos, books, handmade items, handwritten recipes or song sheets or memories or family trees, old tools, furniture, paintings, trunks full of stuff, marriage or birth certificates, old invitations and congratulation cards, diplomas, awards and trophies, ribbons from county fairs, pamphlets, shelves of canned goods, the chicken coop, a garden, a gravestone...

A Big Thank You

Remember to thank the tradition bearer you interview. After all, he or she has just helped you learn a great deal about your community, and may have even helped you get an “A” on your schoolwork! A written note is most proper.

Now that you’ve done at least one interview, it’s time to think about how you’re going to organize and share all the information. Let’s start with the organization and go from there. Think of all the information you have gathered, such as tapes, photos, pamphlets, samples of crafts, song lyrics, etc., as the raw ingredients of a recipe. You’ll have to put them together to make something you can serve up to your classmates!

To Log or to Transcribe?

You’ve got the spoken information down, hopefully on tape. As soon as possible, you should listen to the tape and get the information down on paper. (If you’ve taken notes, you should read them over and add anything you think you forgot to write down. Then organize your notes so they make the most sense.)

There are two choices: to log or to transcribe.

Logging a tape has nothing to do with trees, unless you count the paper you write on. Logging a tape means taking notes from the tape’s contents. Basically, you note what the person was saying on each section of the tape (using the numbers on the little counter that is on most tape recorders).

Here’s part of a logging form to give you the idea. You’ll find a blank logging form that you can reproduce for your own interview in Appendix D.

Tape Log

Name of Person(s) Interviewed: Mr. Eddie Cusic, Mrs. Lucinda Cusic

Researcher: Ashley Harris

Date of Interview: 5/12/98

Location of Interview: Cusic’s home, Leland, Mississippi

General description of contents: Blues music, Mr. Cusic’s life history, Mrs. Cusic’s life history, soul-food cooking

tape counter #'s:

00-120: Mr. Cusic introduces self. Sings part of blues song with guitar. How he started playing the blues.

121- 150: Plays part of another song. Speaks of role models in his music.

Speaks of family connections. “Anything that don’t go right gives you the blues.”

151 - 178: Mrs. Cusic comes in and introduces herself...



Notice how, whenever a new topic comes up, the tape counter number is noted. This makes it easier to find later. Also notice the use of quotations for direct transcribing of an interesting statement or phrase.

Transcribing means taking down the words from the tape, word for word. (The fancy Latin name for this is *verbatim*!)

In other words, when transcribing, you try to catch every single thing the person and the interviewer say. This takes a long time, as much as 13 or 14 hours per hour of tape.

You could do a combination of logging and transcribing as well. Log the general contents of the tape, and transcribe word for word the parts that you might want to quote directly.


To log or to transcribe depends on how you are going to use the information. More about that soon. But you will need to do one or the other, or both, to decide whether you need any follow-up interviews or more information of any kind.

See Appendix E for a sample transcription and for forms to do your own.

Follow-up Questions and Further Research

Okay, so you've listened to your interview, and logged or transcribed it. Is there something missing? Did you forget to ask some key question, or do you not understand one of the answers?

If there's a lot you're still curious about, you might want to schedule another interview. If there are just a few gaps, a call or visit to clarify things might be all you need.



LaBeth: I'll probably go to the Catfish Farmers of America and get booklets on catfish farming.

You might need to follow up your interview with more research. Old newspaper clippings, town records, reference books, displays at local historical museums, pamphlets from businesses (like the catfish farmers' association) could help. Ask your school or town librarian, a local historian or museum curator, or anyone else for help if you need it.

In turn, what you find out might make you want to do one or more follow-up interviews with the tradition bearer, or to interview others who know more about the topic.

What Do You Do with Conflicting Information?


The person you interview says that the Baptist Church was built in 1920, but your follow-up research says it was actually 1922. Well, people's memories are not always entirely accurate.

Can you remember what you ate for dinner last Thursday?


Oral history records people's memories and impressions. Often these are very accurate, but not always. In community research, exact dates are not as important as people's eyewitness accounts of moments in history that have affected their own lives. Their feelings and details bring history alive for us all.

You have gathered some incredible information from your tradition bearer. That's exciting! But even more exciting is thinking about what that information has taught you.

What else did the researchers in the videotape learn?



Steven: When I grow up, I want to become a corporate lawyer. What are the relations between a lawyer and a preacher?



Rev. Myles: Oh! Well, in the sense that lawyers have to convince jurors, have to convince judges to believe that what they say is right, so it is with the preacher of the gospel. His job is to persuade.

VI. Bring on the Analytical Power!

Sasha learned how quilters need to know their math to make a good quilt. With the information Mrs. Taylor gave her, she could make lots of math problems. But she also learned to appreciate the way that math is used in everyday life, even in an old tradition like quilting.

Laura learned that a family can have more than one cultural identity. The Chows are of Chinese ancestry and follow many Chinese traditions. But they also live in the Delta, and their traditions are tied to the foods, weather, and natural resources of the region.

Ashley learned that blues music and soul food make good partners. But she also learned how soul food fits in with the setting of social clubs and “house parties” where the blues were played.

Can you see how each of the researchers could work what they have learned into an interesting written report, and a dynamite class presentation?

Your teacher has a guide with more ideas of how to analyze some of the information the community researchers in the video gathered. He or she may share some of these exercises with you to give you some practice in analyzing your own information.

A Word on Ethics in Collecting [Important!]

Huh??

Consider this. Mrs. Smith asks you not to use a certain part of her interview in anything you write. You know, the part where she complains about her husband’s mother. You agree. But when you’re transcribing the tape, that turns out to be the funniest story of all, and you use it anyway. You figure Mrs. Smith will never find out.

Jimmy Jones in your class is best friends with Mrs. Smith’s grandson Billy. Jimmy tells Billy about your presentation, including that funny story, and Billy tells his grandmother and... well, you get the drift. By using the information you agreed not to use, you were being unethical.

It is important to respect the wishes of the person you are interviewing. There might be hurtful or damaging information included in your interview.

If possible, let the person you are interviewing read the transcript of your interview, or a copy of a draft of your final product, before you turn it in. If information they do not want made public is contained in the taped interview, they can request that you put some sort of restriction on the use of the tape. (Check with any archive you are planning to put your tape into about this.)

Professional oral historians and folklorists usually get people to sign a release explaining what the information will be used for. The release gives you and other researchers permission to use the information in the tapes and photos for educational purposes. There is a sample release form in Appendix C.

Use your common sense, too. You should have a pretty good idea of how to present your information so that it won’t be upsetting or damaging to the person you interview, his or her family and neighbors, and the community. If you are unsure, talk to your teacher and your parents about it.

Ideas on Presenting Your Information

Steven: I’m going to write it down and present it to my classmates so they can learn what I’ve learned.



Laura: Well, with the photographs I’ll probably display them and put captions under them, and I’ll show step by step what she did to prepare the food.



Ashley: My title will be “Cooking with Blues: How Do They Go Together” or maybe write it like this, “When You’re Cooking, No Doubt You’ll Want to Relax Your Mind. Listen to the Blues by Mr. Cusic.”



Now comes the fun part: presenting your information in an interesting way to your class. Or maybe even the whole school or town!

While you may be required to write a report, your teacher might also want you to “get creative” with your presentation.

Here are some ideas:

An Exhibition

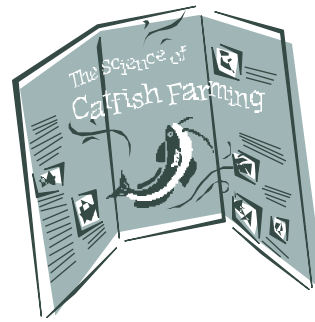
An exhibition is, basically, some information from your research (photos, crafts, tools, books, whatever) organized with labels or other ways of telling why the information is interesting and important.

Here are some other examples of topics for exhibitions using the interviews from the video:

Quilts and How to Make Them Using Math

The Science of Catfish Farming

Growing up Chinese in the Mississippi Delta



Let's look more closely at the way Ashley could organize part of an exhibition on the relation of blues to food. Can you think of other possibilities?

Photo of Mr. and Mrs. Cusic

Label: This is Mr. Eddie Cusic and his wife Mrs. Lucinda Cusic. He plays blues music. She cooks great soul food. These two traditions go together really well.

Photo of Mr. Cusic playing blues in a club or on stage, or at home

Label: Mr. Cusic plays the blues at some local clubs, or sometimes at his home or other people's houses. A lot of times, food is served where the blues is played. That's because food and music are both part of a good time.

Audio cue: A recording of one of Mr. Cusic's blues songs could play in the background. This could be a blues song that has something to do with food, like “Catfish Blues.” (The lyrics to the song could be included here.)



Photo of Mrs. Cusic cooking

Label: Mrs. Cusic likes to listen to the blues when she is cooking. She says that the kind of food she cooks is “food for the soul.” Blues music is like “food for the soul” too, I think. (One of Mrs. Cusic's recipes could be reproduced here, too.)

Can you see how an exhibition like this could be used for social studies, language arts, or home economics?

A Performance or Demonstration

Performance doesn't have to mean a song and dance routine, although that would be fun. An oral report could qualify. Also a skit or play. Even a puppet show based on the information you gathered from your interview.

A slide show is slightly less creative, but could still be interesting. Here's a possibility for a slide show using some of the Delta information.

“The World of the Chow Family”

Slides showing where the Chows live, including some taped statements by them about living in the Delta. Old photos of their family, copied to slide film. Photos of Mrs. Chow cooking. Narration (from the interviewer) about how this family combines Chinese traditions with Delta traditions...

Video is an alternative to slide shows, if the equipment is available, of course.

What about a demonstration? How do you make sweet potato pie or stir-fried greens, and can the class taste the results? How big is a full-grown catfish, and can LaBeth's grandpa bring one in a small tank to school?

The ideal would be for LaBeth's grandpa, or Reverend Myles, or Mrs. Taylor to come into class and help with the demonstration. You should work with the person you interviewed and your teacher to see if this is a possibility. And make sure you do most of the work, not the person you interviewed!

You'll need to introduce the person and give some information about what they'll be doing. While they're demonstrating, ask some of the questions you asked during your interview. Encourage the

“audience” (your classmates) to ask questions of their own. Help with set-up and clean-up.

To make sure the demonstration relates to your subject, you might even create a worksheet for the class to fill out or a problem for them to solve. For example:

Mrs. Taylor is making 10 stitches to the inch on her quilt. How many stitches will there be in 450 inches? If it takes her one hour to stitch a yard, how many hours will it take her to stitch 40 yards?

Challenge your audience to learn something significant, or, if possible, to try their hand at something. How many stitches can one of your classmates make in an inch of fabric?

More Project Ideas!

Here's half a dozen more project ideas, using examples from the research that the community researchers did, which is documented on the video. Can you think of six more to make a dozen?



1. Compose a rap song based on some of the information you gathered. Could you turn a blues song into a rap song?
2. Make a cookbook with recipes you gathered. Add your own family recipes, and collect some more from your friends. Maybe a theme, like “Best Catfish Recipes” or “The Delta Chocolate Cookbook”? Include stories about the cooks and recipes, too.
3. Do like Steven Richardson who talked to Reverend Myles, and compare the skills of the person you interviewed with work skills you'd like to have. (Steven asked Reverend Myles to compare being a preacher with being a lawyer.) Write a “job description” using these common skills.
4. “Interview” yourself and compare your life today with the life of an older person you interviewed. What's different? What's the same? Write a story based on the information.

5. Create a match-up game using photos you took (or even objects you've borrowed!) and information or quotes from the person you interviewed. Example:

- Five photos of different quilt patterns
- Five quilt names with explanations of why they are called that. Like, “This one is called Grandmother's Flower Garden because I think it looks like flowers of all colors on a background of leaves. My own grandmother had a beautiful garden, and whenever I look at this quilt I think of her pansies and petunias and I smile.”



6. If the person you interviewed talked about seasonal work around the year, make a calendar with drawings or photos showing a different activity for each month. Or a different stage of a catfish's life for a year. Or a different blues song, quilt pattern, or sermon excerpt, or whatever. Write an explanation or use a quote for each month, too, and note important holidays in your community.

It's Fun to Do More Than One

Sasha: I will go to my grandmother's house and ask her how did she learn to quilt.



So far we've been talking about interviewing just one person. But if you get the hang of this interviewing stuff and want to do more, great!

Think about how you can do a series of related interviews for a more in-depth project. You could interview 10 quilters and compare their work. You could find out if the catfish farmer in a neighboring county does things differently from the one you interviewed. You could interview six people about their experiences during the flood of 1937. You could interview one Chinese-American person, one African-American, one Lebanese-American, one Japanese-American, and one Native American, or any combination you can find of different groups, about their life in the Delta. You could interview 12 people who once worked in a factory in your town that is now closed down.

You can also team up with friends and classmates to do a really in-depth project. Maybe the local historical society will make some space for your exhibition? Maybe the county weekly newspaper will publish a series of stories you write? Maybe the local cable TV station will air your video? Maybe this will make you rich and famous?

Well, don't count on that, but it will teach you – and everyone who sees your final product – a lot.

What to Do with a Collection

Done the interviews, done the project. Now you have a bunch of tapes and photos and videos and pamphlets on your hands, and you're not sure what to do with them. Should you put them in a shoebox at the back of your closet?

Find out if your local library or historical society has an archive. (Remember? An archive is a special collection of materials.) If they do, they might be interested in adding your interview tapes and photos to their collection.

If you can't find a local place to place the materials, you might ask your teacher to help contact the State Library and Archive to see what their acquisition policy is. (That's a fancy way of saying "whether they'd like to have your stuff or not.")

If you want to keep copies yourself, that's fine. Find a double tape recorder and make yourself a copy. Make another copy for the person you interviewed, if they're interested. But the originals should go to a safe place that will take proper care of them. Your school might want to start its own archive. Talk to your school librarian about it.

Be sure to include copies of your written report, your logs and transcripts, and any other material with the tapes and photos.

Speaking of Your Teacher...

There's a separate guide for your teacher with a list of books and resources in case you want more information. There isn't anything secret in it, just stuff about how community history fits into the curriculum (what you're supposed to be learning) and more background information about the people you've seen in the video.

We hope the video and this guide have been fun and make you want to try your hand at community research!

We'd love to get your feedback on the guide. Send us a letter or a fax:

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Ashley: It's interesting as well as fun because you live right around the corner from them and you never knew, you never knew.

Steven: My dad tells me to discover the things that he is doing. Come on, come on, come on over here. Let me show you this. You have never seen anything like this before. You will remember this for the rest of your life.



VII. Appendices

Appendix A
Who Are You?

Appendix B
Tape Recorder Advice
More Photography Information

Appendix C
Interview Report Form
Release Form

Appendix D
Tape Log

Appendix E
Tape Transcription Form

Appendix F
Photo Log Form

Appendix A

Who Are You?

1. Name _____
2. Hometown _____
3. I live with: _____
 - a. Mother: Name _____
 - b. Father: Name _____
 - c. Grandmother: Name _____
 - d. Grandfather: Name _____
 - e. Aunt: _____
 - f. Uncle: _____
 - g. Other person: _____
4. My home church is _____
 - a. My pastor is _____
 - b. My favorite song in church is _____
5. My favorite food is _____
 - a. Who cooks your favorite food? _____
 - b. How did they learn to cook it? _____
6. My favorite holiday is _____
 - a. On my favorite holiday, I _____
 - b. It is my favorite holiday because _____
7. County my town or city is in: _____
 - a. I would describe my town as: (rural, urban, etc.) _____
 - b. The thing I like the best about my town is _____
 - c. The main industry in my town is _____
8. I go to (name of school): _____
 - a. My favorite subject in school is _____
 - b. After school I like to _____
9. In the summer I like to _____
10. My hobbies are _____
11. Other things I would like people to know about me are _____

12. I am interested in learning more about these three things in my community and the people who live there: _____

Appendix B

Tape Recorder Advice

1. Practice, practice, practice before you go out on your first interview. Make sure you know how the tape recorder works, and how close to the tradition bearer the microphone should be to pick up a voice well. If you are going to do any interviewing while a person is moving, like LaBeth did while she was interviewing her grandfather outside on the catfish farm, practice that, too.
2. Having an external microphone (one that plugs into the recorder with a jack) will give you better sound, but you can use the internal (built-in) microphone if you have to.
3. Tape recorders run on batteries or electricity. Batteries are more flexible — you don't have to find a plug, and you can move around more easily — but you HAVE to make sure they are fresh and won't run down on you in the middle of an interview!! Bring some extra batteries along just in case.
4. Cheap cassette tapes have poor sound quality. If you can, get tapes that have little screws in the side, in case they get jammed and have to be repaired. Tapes that play more than 45 minutes per side are not recommended: they can stretch and break. Go to a record or electronics store and ask about good-quality tapes if you're unsure. Even good-quality tapes aren't that expensive.
5. Background noise is almost always a factor when you're recording. Some noises are great because they help set the scene of the interview. Crickets chirping, birds singing in trees outdoors, the sound of a distant boat motor on a nearby lake — nice. A television or radio blaring, seven grandchildren running in and out and slamming the screen door, a vacuum cleaner — not nice. If noise threatens to drown out your interview, politely ask the people involved in these activities to stop during the interview, or move to another, quieter space.
6. Need to be convinced that tape recording is important? Consider this. A tape recorder picks up every word and creates a permanent record of your interview. The tape recorded interview gives you not only the person's words, but the way he or she says them. Accents, pauses, laughter, turns of phrase, voice pitch (highs and lows) — all of it is captured on tape. That's why professional folklorists and oral historians prefer to get their interviews recorded on tape. So, go pro!
7. Even if you are taping an interview, you might want to take some notes. It helps you focus on what the person is saying to jot a few things down, and can also help clarify things you'll hear on the tape when you listen to it later.
8. You may only get the chance to get this information on tape one time. Make the most of it!

More Photography Information

The Best Camera: A good-quality 35 mm camera. Make sure you know how to use it before you start taking photos. Maybe someone at your school, like the teacher or a student who takes photos for the yearbook or newspaper, could give you a “crash course.”

When to Take Photos: Probably not in the middle of an interview — it can be distracting. It could work if you had someone else along with you to take the photos. After an interview is probably the best time.

Types of Photos to Illustrate Your Interview:

Portraits — Pictures of the person or persons you’ve interviewed in a natural setting, like their front porch, their favorite chair, or their kitchen table.

Action shots — Try to catch the person doing something that they have been talking about: playing the guitar, fishing, quilting, cooking. Try not to make it too obvious that this is staged!

Pictures that set the scene — Long shots of the person’s house, inside and out; the street they live on; their workshop — whatever tells us where this person hangs out and does the things you have been interviewing him or her about.

Pictures that help explain the interview — Make sure you get pictures of tools, equipment, ingredients, and other things that the person uses to do his or her thing. Some tools and other objects are very old and have special meaning for the people who own them.

A Short Guide to Taking Good Photos:

- Try to center the subject in the viewfinder.
- Don’t photograph someone or something in front of a bright window — all you’ll get is a shadow!
- If you have a camera with a flash unit and adjustable settings, and a choice in what film to purchase, use a flash or “fast” film (400 asa) in dim areas. Use no flash and “slow” film (200 asa or under) in bright areas.
- Try to get some photos of the person in action — quilting, singing, dancing, cooking.
- Should you shoot color slides or prints? Well, you can always get prints from slides (it is a bit expensive), but it’s a lot harder to get slides from prints. Planning a slide show? Shoot slides!
- Black and white or color? That depends on what you’re going to use them for. Black and white are good for reproduction in inexpensive publications (newspaper, xeroxed report, or newsletter). Black and white negatives and photos also last longer and fade less than color. Color gives you the most life-like record of what you saw, and black and white copies can be made from color slides or photos. Choose what seems best for your purposes.

A Note on Old Pictures:

Sometimes people have old pictures that can help you get an idea of things they did or places they lived in the past. Ask about these. They can make a great jumping off point or follow-up for an interview. People might even let you borrow an old picture to get it copied for your report. You could do a “quick and dirty copy” by having the person hold the photo and taking their picture with it. Or, find out if your school or a photographer you know has a copy stand — a platform with lights on the sides for copying old photos. Be very careful. People love their old photos and don’t want them to get messed up!

Appendix C

Interview Report Form

Full name of person interviewed: _____
Nickname, if any: _____
Date of interview: _____
Researcher's Name: _____
Address and telephone number of person interviewed: _____

Date of birth: _____
Place of birth: _____
How many years living in this community? _____
Where else lived? _____

Spouse's and children's names (if any): _____

Occupation: _____

Additional skills and activities: _____

Education: _____

Hobbies, interests: _____

Other information: _____

Interview Context:

Where interview took place: _____

Time of day: _____
Sound conditions (background noise): _____

Other people present: _____

Other helpful information (use back if necessary): _____

Other information gathered: tape(s), photo(s), etc.: _____

Release Form

Thank you for participating in the [name of school and project]. By signing the form below, you give your permission to include any tapes and/or photographs made during the [project name] in a public archive where they will be available to researchers and the public for educational purposes including publications, exhibitions, and class presentations. By giving your permission, you do not give up any copyright or performance rights that you may hold.

I agree to the uses of these materials described above, except for any restrictions, noted below.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Restriction description: _____

Appendix D

Tape Log

Name of person(s) interviewed: _____
Researcher: _____
Date of interview: _____
Location of interview: _____
General description of contents: _____

Other information gathered (Interview Report Form, Photo Log, Auxiliary Information): _____

Page 1 of _____
Tape Index # _____
(Notes on content) _____

Tape Log Continuation

Name of person(s) interviewed: _____

Researcher: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Page _____ of _____

Tape Index #

(Notes on content)

Appendix E

Sample Tape Transcription Page

Name of person(s) interviewed: Reverend Marvin K. Myles

Transcription abbreviation(s): MM

Researcher: Steven Richardson

Transcription abbreviation: SR

Date of interview: 5/14/98

Location of interview: Rev. Myles's office at his church

General description of contents: Rev. Myles's background, life, and preaching

Other information gathered (Interview Report Form, Photo Log, Auxiliary Information): photos, recording of Rev. Myles's musical group, Rev. Myles's sermon

Page 1 of 22

tape counter #: 00 – 20

SR: Would you please tell us your name?

MM: My name is Marvin K. Myles. I was born and raised twelve miles from here – a little place called Friar Point, not in town but on the outskirts about five miles.

tape counter # 21 – 105

SR: What was it like growing up?

MM: It was really fun at that time. It was really hard; we were not privy to a lot of things, the “niceties” of life. We were living in framed houses that had board around them and a tin top. There were holes in the wall, holes in the floor, and it rained in the house. At the beginning of my life, we had no indoor restrooms and what have you. In addition to that, my brothers and I had to sleep in the same bed because we didn't have a lot of room. It was really nice because there was not as much breaking in as we have now. We didn't have locks on the doors. We just had nails we put in the door and bent the nail over. That was the only lock we had. But of course, you look around and see that we didn't have to break in because all of us had pretty much the same thing anyway. I had the opportunity to go to church continuously. That was the only place we really went because the house where we lived was only a quarter of a mile from the church. So, we walked to church back and forth constantly, and that was the only place we ever knew.

tape counter 106 – 131:

SR: Did you grow up in a big family?

MM: Yes, I grew up in a very religious family. As a matter of fact, my father had four brothers, and all four of them were ministers. They were Methodist ministers. I really never got a chance to know them very closely. In addition to that, he had a sister who was a minister as well. My brothers, who were older than I, sang gospel music. Basically the only thing we ever knew was church and gospel music. I grew up in that tradition and it took root in me. It continues today....

Tape Transcription Form

Name of person(s) interviewed: _____

Transcription abbreviation(s): _____

Researcher: _____

Transcription abbreviation: _____

Date of interview: _____

Location of interview: _____

General description of contents: _____

Other information gathered (Interview Report Form, Photo Log, Auxiliary Information): _____

Page 1 of _____

tape counter #: _____

Tape Transcription Continuation Sheet

Person(s) interviewed: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Page _____ of _____

tape counter # _____

Appendix F

Photo Log Form

Person(s)/Subject(s) photographed: _____
Photographer: _____
Date(s) taken: _____
Location(s): _____
Type of film: _____
Photo conditions (light, weather, etc.): _____
General description of contents: _____

Other information available (Interview Report Form, Tape Log, Auxiliary Information): _____

Page 1 of _____
photo frame #: _____
Description of contents: _____

Photo Log Continuation Sheet

Person(s)/Subjects photographed: _____

Photographer: _____

Date: _____

Page _____ of _____

photo frame #: _____

Description of contents: _____
