

## Creating and Preserving a Tradition Lesson Plan

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**Title:** Creating and Preserving a Tradition

**Objective:** Students will work in groups in order to produce an essay about folk art or tradition practiced in their community.

**Strategy:** Begin with the “Discussion Guide: Creating and Preserving a Tradition.” Then, students can use the “Activity Guide: Creating and Preserving a Tradition” to formulate presentation.

**Materials:**

1. Discussion Guide: Creating and Preserving a Tradition
2. Activity Guide: Creating and Preserving a Tradition
3. Books about folk art and family traditions such as:

Cornrows by Camille Yarbrought

The Keeping Quilt, Uncle Vova’s Tree, and Rachenka’s Eggs by Patricia Polacco

The Patchwork Quilt by Valerie Flounoy

The Relatives Came by Cynthia Rylant

The Land I Lost by Huynh Quang Nhuong

The Winter Room by Gary Paulsen

Foxfire Journals

### Discussion Guide

- Remind students of the selection from the book Cornrow that was read in Lesson One, “From Cornrows to Sea Grass Baskets.” This book tells us about some of the forms and family traditions in the African-American heritage.
- Show students other illustrated books that describe traditional fold arts and traditions. For example, Patricia Polacco narrates a story based upon the art of painting Ukrainian eggs in Rachenka’s Eggs. In Uncle Vova’s Tree, she remembers celebrating Christmas and epiphany in Russia.
- The Patch Quilt by Valerie Flounoy and The Keeping Quilt by Patricia Polacco are stories about family traditions quilt making.
- Explain that these books help preserve traditions. Have students think about the traditions and folk arts that are practiced in their community. There may be traditions that existed at one time, but are not practiced any more.
- Divide students into groups. Each group will decide what community tradition or folk art to focus on. Students should choose jobs that interest them. Each group needs at least one:

Researcher/field worker

Writer/editor

Final Presentation/group

**Activity**

- Distribute copies of the “Activity Guide: Creating and Preserving” to each group to help students plan their project.

Choose a local folk art or tradition that seems important enough to write about. For example, in some places, storytelling is very important. (Northwest lumberjacks’ stories about their hero Paul Bunyan are world famous!) Other communities have a rich tradition of gospel music. Basket making is a deep-rooted tradition in Mount Pleasant (South Carolina). Holiday celebrations are important in almost all communities.

After your group has chosen a tradition, develop a research plan. One good way to find out more information is to interview community members who practice the tradition. Brainstorm what you want to know about the tradition or folk art. Add question to the “Field Work Interview Guide.” Here are some examples:

1. How did you learn to do this?
2. How long did it take you to learn?

Think about whom you want to read your essay. How old is your audience? Will they be local folks or the general public? The intended audience will largely determine how the story is written and illustrated.

Individuals will be responsible for their assigned jobs but should be encouraged to work with others. The group needs to meet together periodically to make sure everyone is on the same track, or at least going in the same direction.

**Research:**

Use the “Field Work Interview Guide” to interview family, friends, neighbors and local experts/practitioners to gather more information about the tradition or folk art.

The researcher is responsible for collecting information. The informant is the person being interviewed. If possible, use a tape recorder to record the interviews, take notes, collect objects and illustrations.

Contact the potential informant. Introduce yourself and explain that your class is collecting information for a school project. You can follow the interview guide; however, it is all right if the informant doesn’t answer every question or digresses from the subject. You may learn important information this way. Sometimes when you are doing an interview, one question will lead to another. Feel free to pursue these leads. You want to collect as much information as possible, and you want to reflect your informant’s sense of the subject, not your own.

After you have completed the interview, listen to your tape and read your notes. You may need to organize the information you have gathered.

## Field Work Interview Guide

Date

Collector

Time and Place of Interview

Informant's Name

Informant's Address

Sex

Age

Occupation

Ethnic Group

Religion

Questions:

1. How long have you lived in this area?
2. Why did you or your family come to live in this area originally?
3. Why did you (or your parent) decide to leave home here? What pushed you away from you home? What pulled you here? Was it a difficult decision?

(Add your questions to this guide)

Writing:

You need to decide how to use the information you have gathered. You may want to tell a fictional story as in **Rachenka's Eggs**. You may want to write in the first person as in **The Keeping of the Quilt or Cornrows**. You can present information as a non-fiction documentary or distill in a poem.

Working with the researcher, the writer makes an outline and then writes a first draft. Keep in mind you chosen audience as you select the words to tell the story.

Ask other members of the group to read the draft and help with revisions.

You may see gaps that need to be filled. You can call the informant if you have a few additional questions or want to clarify points. Use the library to collect background information.