

Special Writing Project Packet:

Writing Stories About Family and Community Traditions

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Time Required: 7 sessions (with homework assignments)

4th and 5th Grade Curriculum

Connections:

E/LA Writing Standards

2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

5. With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.

Materials:

One copy per student of each:

1. Guidelines for Family and Community Traditions Stories: Page 5
2. Sample Story: Pages 6-7
3. Example Letter to Parents: Page 8
4. Guide to Interviews: Page 9
5. Story Proposal: Page 10
6. Sample Draft to Edit: Page 11
7. Peer Feedback Form: Pages 12-14
8. Interview Questions Web: (separate page)

Set of four colors of highlighters for every four students.

Folders to hold all the forms and story drafts.

Introduction

This project can be undertaken by a single class or by a group of classes working together. You will need to decide early on in the process if/how you plan to publish or share student stories.

Procedure

Session One: Introduce the project to students by explaining that they will be writing stories about family and community traditions.

Ask them who they think would be interested in reading a story about the community. Help them see that there is a very specific audience – generally people who live in or used to live in the community, and people who are interested in learning about local history.

Adjust for your class and review the guidelines with students, allowing discussion of each point. Be sure that students understand how the guidelines relate to purpose and audience. For example, the reason for including the maiden name of a married woman is because it will catch the interest of another community member who might have known her in her youth.

Review the Suggested Topics List and ask students to give examples of stories they might write. When you discuss local artists, craftsmen, and musicians, make sure that students understand that you are not necessarily talking about professional artists. Ask them if they know someone who makes quilts, whittles, sings at church, plays an instrument, or tells stories.

Be flexible in accepting other topics. Stories on four wheeling and demolition derbies also can be relevant. The point is to find a local connection that is of interest to the student and allows them to express pride in their family or community.

Read and discuss the Sample Story, MY GRANNY. Does it fit the guidelines? To keep students' attention, read 1-2 paragraphs and then ask quick recall questions to see who can supply specific details (date of birth, full name, etc.). This reminds students that you will expect specific details in their stories.

Adjust for your class and distribute the Parent Letter and ask students to take it home. Quite often parents do not realize that they are allowed to help their students with this project. Make sure they realize they are not only allowed, but actually encouraged to do so.

Session Two: Remind students that the stories must be based at least in part on interviews. Distribute and discuss the Guide to Interviews.

Set up a mock interview, allowing students to interview you. Be tough. If they ask you a question that can be answered yes or no, simply respond with a yes or no.

Ask students to decide whom they will interview and what the range of their questions will be (have several suggestions ready of people that they might interview on the school staff for those whose families might not be able to help them.). Remind students to be realistic. If their grandpa is going to be in Florida for the next two months, they will either have to interview him by phone or Internet or think of someone more accessible.

Distribute the Interview Question Web and ask each student to think of at least two questions that begin with each of the words. Model the process to get them started by developing a web on the board for someone that you might interview. If you possibly can, actually write a story yourself. You will be amazed how your example will inspire your students.

Distribute and review the Story Proposal. Assign students to have these ready by a specified date. Try to assign this over a weekend to maximize the possibility of family interaction and involvement.

Session Three: Ask each student to present their story proposal to the class and ask for class input on the appropriateness of the story to the guidelines. Ask students to suggest details that should be included with each story. Assign students to conduct their interviews. You might require documentation of the interview such as notes, a tape, or a video.

Session Four: The process of converting an interview to a story requires editing out all the questions, rearranging the answers, and adding some explanations and transitions for clarity and flow. Distribute the Sample Draft and have students read it. Ask them if it is somewhat confusing. Explain that when people give interviews, they often jump from topic to topic, and it is the writer's job to arrange all the information in a coherent way, either chronologically or by theme. Ask students to identify four time periods that are discussed in this story. List them on the board. Divide the students into groups of four. Explain that they are going to use different color highlighters to highlight sentences that relate to one of the four time periods. Model the process by doing the first three sentences as a large group. Then let them work as small groups. Once they have highlighted the sentences, they will re-write the story with four paragraphs. They may combine or re-arrange sentences.

Assign students to begin the process of converting their interviews into stories as homework or provide class time. Encourage them to use the process of grouping elements of the interview chronologically or by theme. Assign a due date for the first draft.

If possible, allow students to write their drafts on the computer and save them. This will save them time when they are ready to revise and edit and also let them take advantage of the Spell Check and Grammar Check.

Session Five: Distribute and review the Peer Review Form. Assign students to work with a partner and exchange papers. When the forms are complete, the partners should discuss them.

Session Six: Allow class time for revision based on the Peer Review and for editing for grammar and spelling. If possible, let this process take place in the computer lab working with saved drafts.

Session Seven: If you plan to publish, work on layout and scanning photos into the text.

Assessment Suggestions

Points may be awarded for:

- The story proposal
- The interview web
- Documentation of the interview
- Contributions to class discussion of proposals
- The rough draft
- The peer review forms
- The final draft
- Illustrations
- Punctuality

You could develop and use a rubric based on how well students met each of the guidelines and how well the student demonstrated an awareness of audience and purpose. Be sure to share the rubric with students and ask for their input before they begin working on their stories.

Extensions

1. Publish a class book and have a reading for families and community.
2. Use the material collected as the basis for a picture book.
3. Ask students to identify (orally or in writing) elements of culture that appear in their stories.

Guidelines For Family and Community Traditions Stories

Our class is writing stories about traditions in our families and communities. It will be a collection of stories told by people who live in the community, or who used to live in the community, or by people who attend school or teach in the community.

We are looking for a wide variety of stories about our history and our unique traditions. These stories will include memories of the way things were, family histories, stories about the Civil War, local traditions, crafts, and tall tales, etc.

All of our stories will have a few things in common:

* The stories must show the community in a positive light. It is fine to write about how people have dealt with hardships and problems, but we don't want stories that make our community sound like a horrible place to live. We are proud of our community and want our stories to reflect that pride.

* The stories must show something about family or community traditions.

* All stories must be based, at least in part, on interviews. Include the full name of the person interviewed (including maiden name) and, whenever possible, names of schools, places, and churches mentioned in the story. Dates are helpful when known.

Suggested Topics

1. Stories about how food was raised or stored before people had freezers and electric stoves. How do people still use these old time techniques?
2. Stories about activities that are special to your region (gardening, fishing, quilting, bee keeping, hunting, etc.) These could be how-to stories, personal narratives, or biographies about people who carry on these traditions.
3. Stories about local artists, craftspeople, storytellers, or musicians.
4. Stories about people who do things for themselves, such as building a house, restoring antiques, or sewing their own clothes.
5. Stories about how things were made in the old days (furniture, tools, clothes, and houses).
6. Stories about games people used to play or toys they made (and still make).
7. Stories about local traditions such as bluegrass music and dances like the Virginia Reel. You might write the story about changing traditions. What were dances like when your great grandmother was a teenager? Compare that to today's dances. You might write a biography of a musician, dancer, or instrument maker.
8. Stories passed down in the family or community.
9. The memories of one person about his/her life. This person should be a senior citizen.
10. The history of a local church or school.

Sample Story

MY GRANNY

By

Brandon Mobley

Fourth Grade Student

Manchester Elementary, Clay County, Kentucky

My story is about my great-grandmother, Thelma Murray Maricle. She was born February 13, 1919. We call her Granny. Her parents were John and Nancy Murray. John Murray's father came here from North Carolina. He was, I guess, what we call a pioneer. He walked through the mountains all the way from North Carolina to Kentucky. He first settled here in a place my granny called Adella, Kentucky, which sounds like a place far away, but it's not. It's right here in Fogertown, Kentucky. She was born at home, not in a hospital, and there was no doctor there. She came from a family of ten children. She had four brothers and five sisters. They lived in a log cabin. It had an upstairs. The walls were decorated in newspapers. My mom played in it when she was little. She even found an old Sears catalog there once. My granny said that about ten years ago, a man from Gatlinburg, Tennessee bought the cabin. He took it apart log by log. He even took the old rocks they had used long ago to build it. He put it back together the way it was first built, so that it could be on display at a museum.

Her father was a farmer. He raised all the food that they ate. Her mother canned and always raised a garden. Granny got two pairs of shoes a year, a winter pair and a pair of Sunday shoes. My granny went to church at Pine Grove Christian Church. They had Sunday school every Sunday but only had church once a month. There is a new Pine Grove Church now, but it's in a new place. The old one is up a little road near the cemetery where my great grandfather is buried. It is in walking distance of where I live.

My granny's family kept their house warm by a fireplace. They walked or rode a horse everywhere they went. My granny played lots of games when she was little. She played hopscotch, horseshoes, hide and seek, red rover, and handkerchief. She also played with rag dolls that her mother made. She went to grade school right across the street from my house. It was called Murray Elementary. She went to high school at Burning Springs High and at Fogertown High School.

She was married on December 14, 1941 to Harvey Maricle. He was born on March 3, 1909. They had one child, and that was my papaw, Cletus Maricle. He was born on July 26, 1943.

My granny was a teacher. She began teaching before my papaw was born. Her first school was a one-room school. It was Murray Elementary (where she went). My granny was lucky. She got to go to college. She went to Eastern KY University. She worked and put herself through college. Back then you could teach before you finished college, so she taught through the regular school year and went to college in the summer months. That's one of the reasons it took her so long to graduate. She graduated in 1960, the same year that her son, (my papaw), graduated from high school. It took her almost 15 years to graduate.

When World War II started, she had to drop out for awhile. Her husband and her brother went to war. She says while the war was going on that things were different and

harder. They made lots of extra food and kept extra animals on the farm. My granny and her mother knitted wool socks for the soldiers and sent them to them. They even made some for my papaw, who was just a little boy, so that his feet would be warm, too. Granny's older brother, Kermit Murray, was killed during battle and was awarded with a Purple Heart and several other medals for his bravery.

My great grandfather (granny's husband) died when he came home from the war. Granny was by herself with a little baby. She had help, though, from her father and brothers. She continued to teach and farm after the war. My granny raised chickens to eat and to get some eggs to eat and some to sell. She raised hogs for their meat and cows for milk. My granny and my papaw, Cletus, milked the cows every day. She canned food and raised a garden every year. My mom said she could make the best strawberry jam. She also made her own lard to cook with and made the soap they used.

My granny started raising tobacco in 1953; she actually dropped the plants herself. As my granny got older she would hire work hands to help her with the tobacco. She would cook for them while they worked.

My granny first got electricity in 1950. She got an inside bathroom in 1955. My granny remembers lots of things about long ago times. She said when she was little that people made medicine for their colds by digging something called yellow root and boiling it. Sugar was then added and it was put into whiskey to help your cough when you were sick. To have fun she said the men would play fiddles and banjos, and the women would sing. They would square dance too, but granny said she was never very good at it. She can remember when the men in her family had real cattle drives; they rode horses and drove their cattle to London to sale. She said they drove turkeys that way too.

She told us a story about when her grandfather came here through the mountains from North Carolina, there were other settlers with her grandfather and one night when they got very tired and cold, they stopped at an empty cabin in the mountains to sleep and get warm. While they were inside, they built a fire in the fireplace and when the fire started, copperheads came out and bit two of the settlers.

She knows lots of neat things about our county, especially Fogertown and Burning Springs, and what is really neat is that I've lived right there too, and lots of these places and things are around me. My mom said my granny could tell the best stories in the world. She called them "Jenny Lou" stories. My mom said she wished she had written them down so other people could have read them. People would have really liked them.

My granny is 80 years old now and has retired from teaching. She retired in 1974 after 32 years. My granny is a real neat lady and I love her.

(School Letterhead goes here)

Dear Parents,

Your student's class is involved in a very special project. They are writing stories about family and community traditions. We are looking for a wide variety of original stories about our history and our traditions. These stories will include memories of the way things were, family histories, stories about the Civil War, local traditions, crafts, and tall tales, etc. Even if you are not originally from our community, the memories you can share with your child are a part of our community because you and your children are part of our community now! Your memories are part of our community heritage.

Your student will need your help for this project. They will need to interview family members or other people in the community to find stories. Please think about stories you or other family members could tell them. You could tell them about the first person in your family to move to this community, how your grandparents raised their food, or family stories about the Depression. We are also interested in stories about people who are continuing a tradition, such as quilting, basket making, or hunting.

If you have questions, contact your child's teacher.

Thank you for your support!

Guide to Interviews

The purpose of your interview is to get the person you are interviewing to tell you a story. Sometimes you will know exactly what story you want to hear, but more often, you will not. It is a good idea to go into the interview with a list of questions so you will have a starting point, but don't feel that you have to stick strictly to the questions you thought up in advance. Listen to what the person you are interviewing says and let that guide you. Some questions will not get much of a response, but others will.

When you find a subject that the person wants to talk about, listen! Quite often, as you listen, you will think of other questions you want to ask. Wait until the person stops talking (never interrupt!) and ask those questions. Take notes or record the interview. Always make sure that you have recorded the person's full name and the date of the interview. If the person mentioned other people or places, check to make sure you have the correct spelling of all names.

Interview Questions

You want to ask questions that will get the most response. Avoid asking questions that can be answered yes or no. Instead, ask open-ended questions.

Suppose you are interviewing your grandmother about her school days. Below you will see two lists of questions -- the yes and no questions; and the open-ended questions. Study these and then make a list of your own, open-ended questions.

Yes or No Questions (to be avoided)

Was school different when you were my age?

Did you like school?

Did you have to walk to school?

Open-Ended questions (good ones to use)

How was school different when you were my age?

What did you like most about school?

How did you get to school?

Be ready with follow-up questions. If your grandmother says she walked to school, ask her how far. Who walked with her? What did she see along the way? Get as many details as you can!

Do not be pushy. If there is a topic (such as a person's age) that your interviewee obviously does not want to discuss, let it drop. Remember that interviewees are doing you a favor by granting you an interview. Treat them with courtesy and appreciation.

Let your interviewee proofread your story before it is published. Provide him/her with a copy of the final draft.

Story Proposal

Author's Name _____

Proposed topic _____

Purpose of the story
(Circle all that apply)

1. To entertain
2. To inform
3. To persuade
4. To explain a process or tradition
5. To preserve family or community history
6. To preserve personal memories
7. To communicate feelings or ideas
8. To honor
9. Other (please explain) _____

Who is your audience for this story? What details will they want to know?

What type of story will you write?
(Circle the type)

1. Biography
2. Personal narrative
3. How-to
4. Feature article
5. Retelling a traditional family or community story
6. Other (please describe) _____

How will you gather information for this story? Who will you interview? When?

Sample Draft for Students To Edit

MY GRANNY'S LIFE

By
Joan Adams

My grandmother, Ellen Smith Adams, grew up in Hooting Holler. Her best friend at school was Tammy Jones. She married my grandfather in 1952. Her parents were farmers. They grew all their own food. She walked to school with her friends. She had five children. My grandparents met at church. Her mother grew all their vegetables in a garden. Tammy liked to talk in class and they always got in trouble. Mammaw helped her mother in the garden. My grandfather was Robert Adams. Mammaw had three brothers. She carried her lunch to school. She took biscuits and a baked potato. Pappaw was a coal miner. Mammaw stayed at home and took care of the children and grew a big garden. Mammaw has thirteen grandchildren. Mammaw's daddy butchered a hog every year and went deer hunting for meat. There were forty three children in her school and they were all in the same room. Mammaw had lots of chores when she was little. She helped in the garden, hoed corn, fed the chickens, and took care of her younger brothers. They heated the school with a pot-bellied stove. Mammaw didn't have any electricity when she was little. Mammaw and Pappaw lived in Caney Creek Holler. Pappaw died five years ago, but Mammaw still lives there and raises a garden. She met Pappaw when she was eighteen and they were married when she was twenty. Mammaw spends a lot of time with her grandchildren and still raises a big garden. She is teaching me to garden. Her family is the most important thing to Mammaw, and Mammaw is important to her family. We all love her.

Reviewer's Name _____

Author's Name _____

Peer Feedback – Family and Community Traditions

Keep in mind that the purpose of peer feedback is to help the author improve his or her story by providing feedback from a reader. If the reader is unable to answer one of the questions, perhaps the author needs to add something to the story to make his or her purpose clearer.

It is important to point out the strengths of a story as well as any weaknesses. Also keep in mind that the author of the story has the final word regarding any revisions.

At this point, we are trying to make sure that the story meets our guidelines and is well organized and interesting. Later on, we will focus on spelling and grammar.

1. What is the main topic of the story?

2. What does the topic have to do with family or community traditions?

3. Who was the person interviewed for this story? Please give the full name.

4. What could a reader learn from this story? _____

5. Did you have any emotional response to the story? Were there parts that were funny or sad? Did any parts remind you of something in your own life or your own family?

6. How do you suppose the author feels about the topic? How can you tell?

7. What was your favorite part of the story? _____

8. Were there any parts of the story that were confusing? What parts? _____

9. What else would you like to know about this topic? Are there other details that the author could add to make it more interesting? _____

10. If a story is well organized, each paragraph should have one main idea. List the main idea for each paragraph in the story.

11. What other suggestions do you have? _____

NAME of Interviewer _____

Interview Questions Web

Who? _____	What? _____	Where? _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Person you will interview _____ Date _____

Topic: _____

When? _____	Why? _____	How? _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____