



# Saving Local History

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## Subject Areas

Language Arts, Social Studies,  
New Jersey History, Visual Arts

## Duration

Three or four class periods, in addition to outside activity, classroom guest speaker and/or visit to subject to be interviewed

*Can be an ongoing assignment throughout the semester or school year. Can also be greatly enlivened with reenactments and even short skits and plays*

## Setting

Classroom, home, and other location determined by the teacher or interview subject

## Charting the Course

This activity should be student-directed as much as possible. Students should create and develop their interview questionnaire and survey. It is recommended that students practice on each other in class before actually conducting an interview. Access to existing oral histories from within the

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## Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- know what oral histories are and how they are performed,
- participate in performing an oral history;
- organize and select information from a body of data,
- create a record of a folk tradition or family member (dependent upon teacher's selection),
- realize importance of everyone's individual history,
- learn about cultural heritage of diverse people in the Barnegat Bay region,
- learn what traditions are and how they function.

## CORRELATION TO NJCCCS:

The correlations in this publication were done prior to 2002 utilizing the older standards from 1994.

**LANGUAGE ARTS:** 3.1 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,12 ,17),  
3.2 (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10),  
3.3 (1,2,3,5,6,7,8,10,11,12,14),  
3.5 (2,3,6,7,13,14)

**SOCIAL STUDIES:** 6.2 (1,3,4) 6.5 (2,8,12),  
6.4 (1,6) 6.9 (1,2,3,5)

**VISUAL ARTS:** 1.1 (3,4), 1.3 (2,3), 1.4 (1,2,3.),  
1.5 (1-6,8,9)

region will help students understand technique and methods utilized. Included in the resource kit is a past issue of the Barnegat Bay Decoy and Gunning Show program. Each year, the winners of the Conklin award are highlighted. The recipients of this award are recognized for living in the baymen tradition. Also, the Ocean County Historical Society, and all of the individual town historical societies would be a helpful starting point. People from all areas of interest and expertise would be valuable subjects for oral histories.

## Skills

Organizing and selecting appropriate information, researching techniques, interview skills, understanding and appreciating different generational experiences, interpreting, inferring the relationship between spoken (oral) and written traditions.

## Vocabulary

oral history, tradition, family history, genealogy, folk artist, diversity, heritage, folklife (and other specialized terms associated with the interview subject and topics discussed).

This activity has been modified from its original content to be specific to the Barnegat Bay Watershed. It can be viewed in its entirety in the *Down Jersey – Celebrating Our Sense of Place* curriculum, which can be found at [www.cumauricriver.org](http://www.cumauricriver.org)

## 2 Materials

- Pad and paper, tape recorder or camcorder. Be aware that many people are uncomfortable with video format. (Check with interviewees in advance and be sensitive to their needs.) It also could require the use of the computer and the Internet.
- Internet access and/or old family photographs.
- Copies of a standardized recording form for collecting information. This should be either teacher or student developed.
- List of individuals involved with local traditions, including any students' family members.

**NOTE TO TEACHER:** *There is an abundance of interview subjects that can be found in the Barnegat Bay region. Focusing the class on a theme or subject can help narrow the search. For example: Many of the fishing boats that can be found in Point Pleasant and Barnegat are owned and operated by families that may represent several generations.*

## 3 Making Connections

SAVING LOCAL HISTORY is an enormous compliment to a person because it shows that the person made a difference with his or her life. In relation to the Barnegat Bay watershed, recording individuals' influences, experiences, and traditions is a meaningful way to personalize the significance of the region to the lives of the students and their families. Saving local history could be applied to each family's learning how to save the memories from their grandparents. It could simply mean writing down and recording where furniture, glassware, or silverware came from. In an area such as Ocean County, there are always students who are newcomers to the area. It is most important that these students gain an understanding of the people of

this region, the people that have called the Barnegat Bay their home for many years or generations.

## 5 Background

The cultural and historical significance of the Barnegat Bay watershed region has been well documented by a number of groups and organizations such as township historical societies and the Tuckerton Seaport. Use the resource guide included here to identify and contact them. In addition, personal family histories can be developed and would provide meaningful insight into the unique character and diversity of an individual class or group of students. This activity is written in a general way so as to provide the teacher with descriptive methodology in conducting oral histories and is not meant to be specific or inclusive of a particular topic, region, or traditional way of life.

• *Students' participation in conducting oral histories provides a valuable lesson in discovering history first-hand, and realizing the importance of everyone's contributions to the cultural flavor of an area. Of particular significance to recording historical accounts is the necessity for standard information and the accuracy of the interview and recordings made. It is important to relate this to students so that they may be able to discern "truth from fiction."*

Millennia ago, our ancestors would tell stories of bravery in battle, strategy in the hunt, wisdom in conflict, and so on. These oral histories were passed down, generation to generation, long before the written word was in existence. Shared stories not only protected history from being lost, it also strengthened social bonds between individuals, families and clans. Repetition reinforced those bonds and the stories themselves.

In some ancient societies, special storytellers became the repositories of culture. The ancient Greeks, Romans, Celts and others held contests for their storytellers, each trying to outdo the other. Knowing where they came from helped these people know where they were going.

Today, more than ever, it is important that we preserve and cherish our past. Once history is lost, it is gone forever. In Ocean County, rapid growth and development are quickly swallowing up the past and newcomers tend to turn their backs on the culture and history of the region. These and other changes make it difficult for locals to earn their living in traditional ways and in accord with long held values.

The Barnegat Bay watershed is more than just an area of ecological importance. It is an area of great cultural significance as well as the home of cranberry and blueberry growers, clambers, basket makers, decoy carvers, scallopers, fishermen, horse farm managers, lighthouse keepers, farmers and surfmen. Their stories and our own are worth telling.

## 6 Procedure

### WARM UP:

The following ideas and suggestions provide a means for the teacher to introduce the concept of oral histories and the importance of accurate recording. They will provide a powerful illustration to the students regarding detail and detailed recording, while also providing a “new twist” to some familiar games and activities.

- Students play a game of “Telephone,” where a statement is whispered and then passed from student to student. The last student recites aloud what they hear. A comparison is made regarding the actual/initial statement (which is determined by the teacher and can be anything he or she chooses) to the final statement. This provides a powerful example as to the importance of recording accurate information and taking oral histories and putting them into written form.
- Read a passage to the class or provide written materials. Students prepare written summaries individually. The entire class compares their statements and interpretations.
- Ask students to research and share myths from various cultures – Celts, Greeks, Romans, or their own backgrounds. Once students have cho-



*Collecting shrimp in Barnegat Bay. Do you know someone who was once a shrimper?*

Photo courtesy Tuckerton Seaport archives.

sen a myth, they should provide the teacher with a copy of the original story. They should then rewrite the myth in their own words. Discuss the power of myth. Do myths thousands of years old still speak to us and relate today?

- Play a game like charades where students ask questions to learn a set of facts and/or information about the interview subject (the person to be guessed through charades). This could be easily modeled using a well-known figure in the school/community, where students would have a relatively easy time identifying the “mystery” person. Let students practice by having them write the questions needed to solve the mystery. This could easily serve as the springboard for the development of a survey or questionnaire

that could later be refined and edited for use in conducting their oral histories.

■ Use other games as models: “Jeopardy”, “Twenty Questions,” “The Weakest Link,” or similar game shows, would also be appropriate.

■ Have students act out folk songs such as Arlo Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” or those of a local folksinger such as Valerie Vaughn. Have students write a folk song celebrating a figure of local importance.

*See related activity “Songs to Learn By.”*

• For more information on the “how tos” of collecting oral histories, see the *Guide to Collecting Folklore and Folklife* by Peter Bartis, a publication of the Library of Congress.

## THE ACTIVITY

■ Teacher provides an introduction about oral traditions, recording information as the basis of “History,” and the importance of family histories. (Family medical histories are a good example.) Students should practice the methods of recording information. Discuss what information tends to be recorded and what doesn’t—and what is lost as a result. Note to teacher: Sensitivity should be utilized when discussing family traditions as many children no longer live in a traditional nuclear family.

### ■ AS A CLASS, DESIGN A SERIES OF QUESTIONS TO ASK THEIR GRANDPARENT/OR SIGNIFICANT ELDERLY PERSON IN THEIR LIFE.

Individual students conduct an interview of their determined person. They should prepare a summary of the information that they obtained. *This would be an appropriate homework assignment—with enough time allowed for sufficient gathering of information (i.e., over a holiday and/or weekend, etc.).* Many of these questions may not be important. Focus on the important questions and keep in mind that open-ended questions elicit better information. For example: “What was your favorite pastime as child?” A closed question is

“What age did you leave school?” The closed question will give a one-word response, while the open-ended question picks up a story or a longer answer. This calls for good listening skills, and deductive reasoning. See the sample fieldwork data sheet included.

■ **TIME IN CLASS SHOULD BE ALLOWED FOR GROUP SHARING** of the information gathered during their interviews. This could be a short oral presentation, a report, a poster, etc. It is up to the individual classroom teacher to determine what is appropriate for their use. Students could also be required to include illustrations and/or photographs with their history accounts and a class biography could be created, developed and printed.

### ■ AS A CLASS, DETERMINE THE TYPE OF PERSON THAT YOU WANT TO INTERVIEW.

This could range from a local artist, a boat-builder, a trapper, a commercial crabber, a wildlife biologist, a historian, a farmer, a long time resident, etc. The theme or topic being focused on is solely up to the individual classroom teacher and is adaptable at their discretion. Perhaps the names and organizations listed in this guide as resource and advisory people would be a possible starting point for identifying individuals for interviews. Ideally, the interviewee will be a LOCALLY relevant individual who is identified directly by classroom discussions and investigations.

■ **INVITE THE SUBJECT** into the classroom for an interview. If this is not convenient for the guest, a phone interview could also be conducted. Have the students (in an organized fashion) ask questions and record the information in a concise manner. This could be handwritten answers, tape-recorded conversations, and/or videotaped meetings.

■ **INVITE A GENEALOGIST OR HISTORIAN** to come into the class and discuss how formal family histories are conducted and prepared.

■ **INVITE A FOLKLORIST** to the class to discuss what they do and how they do it. The NJ State Council on the Arts is a good source.

## WRAP UP

■ **HAVE STUDENTS DETERMINE THE VALUE AND IMPORTANCE OF COLLECTING ORAL HISTORIES** for the maintenance and preservation of traditions and local folklife.

■ **PUBLISH THE FINDINGS** In a booklet to be distributed wherever appropriate. Be sure to include drawings, photographs, etc.

■ **HAVE THE STUDENTS THANK THE PERSON(S) INTERVIEWED** for their willingness to participate and their contributions to local history. Have the students share the final product of the interview with their subject.

## ACTION

■ **ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO CREATE A PERMANENT FAMILY HISTORY** of their own for future use and enjoyment. Creating a family tree, a holiday journal or scrapbook are also good projects that allow for recording history. All of our stories, big or small, are important.

■ **DISCUSS THE VALUE OF WRITTEN JOURNALS AND DIARIES** and their significance to historical records. Designate a predetermined amount of time within the course of a school day (i.e., five minutes in the beginning/five minutes at the end) to write in a journal. This could be focused on issues that provide a “sense of place” or are open-ended to be determined by the significant events/interactions/issues/ideas for each individual student. *Again, the level of direction given toward this assignment/activity is totally up to the individual classroom teacher.*

■ **POINT OUT OPPORTUNITIES** that exist for students to participate in oral histories through genealogical societies and historical societies. Again this is determined by the level of involvement that the teacher wishes to initiate.

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### Assessment

As determined by the individual classroom teacher and the extent to which this activity was developed and presented. It is important for students to share what they’ve learned and discuss the information they collected.

## 8

### Extensions

■ **CREATE A TIMELINE** of the world, nation, state, county, region, etc. in five year increments for the past 100 years. Plug in important people and events. Invite students to add their own important dates/events. This may work best as a family assignment as students may not have a strong connection to some events.

### ■ DOCUMENTATION OF FOLK ARTISTS

and other individuals:

*Name*

*Date, place of birth*

*Parent’s names and occupations*

*Mother’s maiden name*

*Primary occupation, location, dates,*

*Job description*

*Other occupations*

*Skills necessary for occupation*

*Important changes in occupation, if any*

*Major life events related to occupation*

*Likes/dislikes related to occupation*

*Reason occupation chosen*

*Interviewers name, date, location of interview*

### ■ ARTIFACT DOCUMENTATION

Artifacts are objects used to help us understand the folklife of a people. It could be a tool, toy, clothing, furniture, documents, etc. Because artifacts disappear from use, break, etc. it is important to record them in written form accompanied by a photograph or illustration.

*Name(s) of artifacts*

*Physical description of artifact*

*Time and place of use*

*Description of use*

## ■ PHOTOGRAPHS

All photographs should be documented for reference purposes.

*Names of people in photo*

*Explain why these individuals are important (either to folklorists or the project)*

*Date*

*Place taken*

*Was the photograph taken to highlight a special occasion or event? Explain*

*Name of photographer*

*Relate anecdotes related to the photograph*

## ■ FIELDWORKER'S LOG

*Whenever folklorists do fieldwork, they keep a log or written record of their activities. The following information should be recorded each time.*

*Date and time*

*Place*

*Purpose of event*

*Participants*

*Topics discussed*

*Artifacts observed*

*Fieldworkers' response to event*

*The following hints and suggestions are given by Tricia Dufford, Teacher and Artist, Millville, New Jersey*

■ Students come up with the questions to ask and practice on each other.

■ The students should break down the life of the person being interviewed into periods such as childhood, young adulthood, and maturity. Have students create a life cycle painting that illustrates the way they view their lives.

■ Students should actually meet the person to be interviewed and tape the responses. This may take several visits. These could take place at the school, but seeing and interviewing a person in his or her natural element and using a tape recorder is preferable for accuracy, comfort level of the person being interviewed and freedom/honesty of answers received.

With the right  
interviewing  
techniques,  
you can make him smile.



■ The interview could be made available on the Internet via a school home page. If this is the case, a disc containing the information obtained must be completed. Video can also be utilized via the Internet and computer. This is truly a “talking book” in the most modern sense.

■ Have students research their own families as far back as possible. Particular attention should be paid to the reason(s) their family moved to the area in the first place. A map of New Jersey (United States, and the world) could be used for students to track their families' movements and settlement in the area.

■ OTHER OPTIONS: Students could also choose to research a place. An example could be to write the history of a building, a farm, a boat yard or marina.

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### Resources

In addition to your local historical society, and other resource mentioned:

*Folklores and Folklife, An Introduction*, by Peter Bartis (Library of Congress Pamphlet), available free from the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

*New Jersey Folklore*, an anthology by David Cohen

Visit the **Library of Congress Learning Page** at <http://learning.loc.gov/learn/> Here you will find descriptions of the collections with correlations to school curricula, search guides, sample lesson plans, and student activities.

# FIELDWORK DATA SHEET

Corresponding to: Tape No. \_\_\_\_\_ Photo No. \_\_\_\_\_ Video No. \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Collector: \_\_\_\_\_

Circumstances of interview

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Name of

informant: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ zip \_\_\_\_\_

Others present at interview (names and addresses) \_\_\_\_\_

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Place and date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Family information: \_\_\_\_\_

Size of family (names and ages): \_\_\_\_\_

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Ethnic heritage (mother's and father's): \_\_\_\_\_

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Generation of informant: \_\_\_\_\_

(Date of informant's, parents', or grandparents', great-grandparents' immigration.) From what country(ies)?

Circumstances of immigration: (reasons) \_\_\_\_\_

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Activities in Old World: \_\_\_\_\_

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Migrational experience and travel (U.S.A. and elsewhere):

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Education, apprenticeship, and training experience:

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Occupational experience:

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Church or religious affiliation:

Membership in organizations (civic, social, etc.)

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Special interests, skills, and hobbies:

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Important events during life (civic and personal):

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Folklore and traditional materials in informant's repertoire

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When does he or she perform it?

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Time and circumstance

How, when, where, and from whom did he or she learn it?

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Additional observations by fieldworker: (Character of informant, contact with mass media and modern world, personal opinions and reactions that resulted from or influenced the interview)

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