

## A Folkstreams American Montage

### Introduction

Folkstreams films allow us to experience America through the vision of filmmakers who document our nation's uniquely diverse traditional culture. To make these documentaries more useful for the classroom, we created this American Montage of video excerpts, each about ten minutes long, and accompanying Teaching Guides for four distinct communities where vital folk traditions bespeak a cultural dynamic and history uniquely related to a place and its people. Regional dialect, music, celebrations, and landscapes greet viewers who drop in on these places:

- A rural North Carolina African American family reunion in *A Singing Stream*
- A District of Columbia teen music club in *The Music District*
- A Montana ranch in *Cowboy Poets*
- A large Italian street festival in Brooklyn in *Men Who Dance the Giglio*

Use any or all these Folkstreams film excerpts to compare and contrast people and traditions of different regions. Consider the issues in the context of your own community and to illustrate literature and history. Use the excerpts in one lesson on American culture and history, or use them individually to augment lessons on related topics.

Note when the films were made. They document aspects of communities that may have changed since the films were produced. For example, *A Singing Stream* was made in the 1980s, when the memory of Jim Crow segregation and the Civil Rights Movement were still very much alive in everyone's experience. Students should be made aware of the importance of documentary films as an historical memory: the thoughts, issues, speech, clothes, lifestyles, and aspirations of particular periods in American history. Don't forget, students can watch the films in their entirety on Folkstreams.net!

Information below is useful for all four film excerpts. Specific topics, discussion prompts, suggested activities, extensions, and resources are also included for each title.

**Grade Level** 10-12

**Curriculum Areas** English Language Arts, American History, Social Studies, Visual Art, Music, Media Literacy, Film, Family Life

**Time Required** 1-3 class periods

**Objectives** Students will:

Learn about diverse places, traditional cultures, and art forms across the U.S.

Reflect on their own cultural groups, traditions, and communities

Connect diverse communities and everyday life to American history

Use documentary films as literary texts and primary sources

**Adaptation Strategies** Transcripts for three of the four films are posted on Folkstreams.net. Printing out and copying the script sections for the montage excerpts may help students' comprehension. Assigning four student teams to view and report on each excerpt is another option.

### **Standards**

Link to your state's standards in all disciplines [www.educationworld.com/standards/state](http://www.educationworld.com/standards/state)  
Common Core Standards are being implemented in many states [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)

### **NCTE and IRA Standards for English Language Arts** [www.ncte.org](http://www.ncte.org)

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

### **NCSS Curriculum Standards for Social Studies** [www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org)

#### **I. Culture**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

#### **II. Time, Continuity, and Change**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.

### III. People, Places, and Environments

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

### IV. Individual Development and Identity

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

### V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

### IX. Global Connections

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.

## **Worksheets**

Film Analysis Framework (optional)

## **To Prepare**

- Preview the montage and select any or all the film excerpts for viewing.
- Review and adapt activities, resources, and the Film Analysis Framework for your students.
- Think about cultural groups, events, traditions, and social issues in your community.

## **Procedure**

### **1. Before Viewing**

Prepare students by brainstorming how documentaries differ from feature films.

Ask students to listen for regional speech patterns and dialects and other clues to a place.

**Self-Inventory:** Tell the students what the excerpt is about and ask them to write briefly what they expect to see and hear.

### **2. During Viewing**

Prompt students to write down the basic film information (filmmaker, date, etc.) and take notes as they watch the film. They should write words or terms that interest them or are unfamiliar and quotes that are meaningful to them. To organize observations they may take notes on notebook paper or the Film Analysis Framework.

### **3. After Viewing**

Open discussion by asking students to review their self-inventories. How did the film excerpt differ from what they expected? What surprised them? What tensions and contradictions did they sense? What values were expressed? What is the main message? What are subtexts? What would they ask the filmmakers? Someone in the film?

Use the quotations in each second to prompt students' reflections on the film in discussion or writing.

If viewing more than one excerpt, have students compare films in a class discussion or short essay. What themes recur? How is each unique? Which do they prefer and why?

### **Evaluation/Assessment Strategies**

**Products** Personal narratives, autobiographies, class scrapbooks, artwork, presentations, demonstrations, performances, posters, essays, poetry, Venn diagrams, interviews, storyboards, T-shirt designs, fieldwork research

**Process** Class discussions, reflections, expository writing, interviews, research, creating presentations, analysis, comparing and contrasting, teamwork, memorization

### ***A Singing Stream: A Black Family Chronicle***

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1002082797108094954>

**Excerpt Running Time** 12 minutes

**Filmmaker** Tom Davenport **Copyright Date** 1986

**Distributor** Davenport Films

**Overview** During a reunion of the Landis family of Granville County, NC, this African American family describes the importance of family and singing as well as race relations and economics in the rural South. The brothers sing in a quartet called the Golden Echoes.

**Topics** Family, reunions, southern farm life, northern migration, quartet style singing, African American sacred music, a cappella harmony, Jim Crow segregation, voting rights, school desegregation, resilience

Use one of these quotations to spark discussion.

*"As the boys grew up, I saw that they had a talent for singing. I began to realize that they had a singing stream coming from both sides of the family. I wanted them to grow up and be involved in something that was worthwhile and something that would bring them joy and happiness as they grew up in years. So I began to teach 'em."*

*"I went to work and I've been climbing ever since."*

*"My mother told me I had to go register, that was just something I had to do, we had to vote. "Make sure you vote." Voting day she'd remind us."*

*"We had a school here, and the set-up was altogether different from the white school. We couldn't ever get what we needed. . . .The bus would pass us with the white kids and we had to walk."*

*"Once they saw that, hey, these people are just not a bunch of people from the farm and don't have any intelligence whatsoever. . . .They can come in here compete with us on the same level academically, things kind of changed a little bit."*

### **Suggested Activities**

1. Bertha Landis refers to family photos as she relays family history. Ask students how they think photos augment her story. What do they learn from the images? Assign them to write a short autobiography, illustrating it with photos or drawings, for a class scrapbook.
2. Learn more about the Landis family and the Golden Echoes as well as African American quartet singing in the essay “The Emergence of Gospel Quartets” at [www.folkstreams.net/context/34](http://www.folkstreams.net/context/34). Have students research African American sacred music genres such as quartet singing for class presentations (see Resources).
3. Bertha Landis’s children had to attend all-black schools. Standing in the kitchen, her grandson tells of integrating the local school system. Where do students tell stories? What stories do they tell about challenges? Ask students to tell a story about their family, a school experience, overcoming a challenge, or music they love.
4. Brainstorm with students a list of venues where various cultural groups in your community hear and perform sacred music, from religious denominations of all kinds to CDs, radio, TV, and the Internet. Next, list different genres and styles students know of. Divide students into teams to document a sacred music tradition in a classroom multimedia presentation. One team might focus on the history and regional variations of African American quartet singing like that of the Golden Echoes (see Resources).

### **Extensions**

Use supplementary contextual materials on Folkstreams.net such as the *Singing Stream Study Guide*, essays on eastern Piedmont geography, economics, and culture; gospel quartets; and making the film; and the film transcript.

### **Resources**

#### **Publications**

Lornell, Kip. *Happy In Service Of Lord: African-American Sacred Vocal Harmony*. University of Tennessee Press, 1995.

#### **Web Sites**

See essays, transcript, and other guides for *A Singing Stream* on Folkstreams.net [www.folkstreams.net/film/2](http://www.folkstreams.net/film/2)

**American Routes** [www.americanroutes.org](http://www.americanroutes.org) archives of public radio program hosted by Nick Spitzer include many interviews with African American sacred musicians.

**A History of Gospel Music** [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4233793](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4233793) on the web site of National Public Radio includes many sound samples.

**Jim Crow History** [www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow) offers excellent lessons and activities.

**Louisiana Voices** [www.louisianavoices.org](http://www.louisianavoices.org) Unit VI features resources for documenting local secular and sacred music.

**Smithsonian Folkways Recordings** [www.folkways.si.edu](http://www.folkways.si.edu) distributes *Wade in the Water: African American Sacred Music Traditions Vol. I-IV*, with extensive historical notes by Bernice Johnson Reagan.

### ***The Music District***

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1991506936729813645>

**Excerpt Running Time** 9 minutes  
**Filmmaker** Susan Levitas **Copyright Date** 1996  
**Distributor** California Newsreel

**Overview** This excerpt of a documentary on African American traditional music in Washington, DC, introduces the Junk Yard Band, a Go-Go group who explain and perform a pop music genre popular among African American youth in DC. National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellow Chuck Brown is known as the “godfather of Go-Go” because his DC band developed a heavy rhythm style of funk with one song blending into the next to keep people on the dance floor. As Go-Go bands took off in DC clubs in the 1980s and 1990s, young people started break dancing contests. They call out neighborhood and street names in call-and-response with the band. In the film, teens also use symbols that they flash to the band and the crowd.

**Topics** Teen culture, Go-Go, African American popular music and dance, call and response, improvisation, syncopation, urban life, neighborhoods

Use one of these quotations to spark discussion.

*"A lot of people don't understand go-go music, 'cuz they might hear it on the tape and they don't know what it's about. But, once you come to the performance, then that's where all the energy comes. It's a call-and-response. The whole show involves the crowd. . . . They wanna say, 'Oh, say my name. Say my name. Put me on display.' People love to, you know, be known, you see. Let the crowd know they in the house, you know."*

*"The future starts here with us. Like...how we carry ourselves when we go to the show... you just have to show them that it's not all about violence, that, you know, if you have the talent or the ability to do anything that you should try to go further on with it, instead of, you know, letting the streets hold you back. Because it's not the streets that's holding you back; it's yourself. And we're trying to project that and show them that, that people can come together and do things together without violence."*

### **Suggested Activities**

1. What are the popular music styles and dances that students enjoy? Where do they hear live music? Where do they dance? After discussion, assign students to interview family and community members about music and dance styles of their youth. If possible, they can collect songs and learn dance for classroom demonstrations. Interview forms and worksheets in Unit VI of [www.louisianavoices.org](http://www.louisianavoices.org) will be useful.

2. Go-Go fans depend on posters and word of mouth to learn about performances. How do students find out about concerts and dances? Ask students to design posters for their favorite music. They must use classroom-appropriate language and images!

3. All pop music is rooted in traditional music, from country to salsa, indie to rap. Have students research African American popular music genres such as blues, jazz, doo-wop, rhythm and blues, soul, funk, hip-hop, rap, and Go-Go. Ask them to relate genres to historical eras and changing race relations in oral or written reports. Class presentations should include music samples. How do students think various kinds of popular music today express contemporary social events and mores?

4. Young African Americans in Washington, DC, play on improvised instruments on the street, collecting and carting around plastic buckets of all sizes, like street musician Rapper D in the film. Where do musicians play in your community? Have students collect buckets, cans, and other found objects to create their own junkyard band. Working in teams, students can assemble instruments, work out rhythms and words, perform, and advertise a classroom performance.

### **Extensions**

Use supplementary contextual materials on Folkstreams.net such as the film transcript, discography, and bibliography.

### **Resources**

#### **Publications**

Lornell, Kip, and Charles C. Stephenson, Jr. *The Beat: Go-Go's Fusion of Funk and Hip-Hop*. Watson-Guptill, 2001.

#### **Web Sites**

See transcript, bibliography, and discography for *The Music District* on Folkstreams.net [www.folkstreams.net/film/52](http://www.folkstreams.net/film/52)

**American Routes** [www.americanroutes.org](http://www.americanroutes.org) archives of public radio program hosted by Nick Spitzer include many interviews with African American musicians.

**Louisiana Voices** [www.louisianavoices.org](http://www.louisianavoices.org) Unit VI features resources for documenting local music and dance traditions.

### ***Cowboy Poets***

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2805504552696969123>

**Excerpt Running Time** 14 minutes

**Filmmaker** Kim Shelton **Copyright Date** 1988

**Distributor** Kim Shelton

**Overview** American cowboys have been writing poetry for more than a century. Wally McRae, a National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellow, is a cowboy

poet from southeastern Montana. This excerpt portrays McRae, family ranch life, and neighbors' resistance to a giant coal corporation.

**Topics** Cowboy culture, poetry, American West, strip mining, cultural and environmental conservation, family, fathers and sons, land ownership, ranch life, neighbors

Use one of these quotations to spark discussion.

*"Who's going to tell our story?"*

*"I can't leave these sheep, they're the only thing I own in the whole world."*

*"I think that the kind of poetry you write a lot of times depends upon where you come from, not only philosophically but geographically as well."*

*"If there's one rule in the cowboy code, it dictates that we be hospitable."*

*"Coal development...has made our cowboy culture that much stronger."*

*"The ritual of branding is a renewal of our whole culture."*

*"Our concerns [about mining] were more cultural or social than environmental and, finally, long-term economic. What are we going to be left with?"*

### **Suggested Activities**

1. Read the first stanza of Wally McRae's poem "The Leasehound" aloud. Ask students how the poet renders the mining company representative in contrast cowboy culture in just a few lines. *The derogatory title; clothing such as a leisure suit and shoes that have laces, unlike boots; smells of talcum and liquor; the vastness and altitude of the region.*

### **The Leasehound**

*A sharpie in a leisure suit,  
With eyelets in his shoes  
Who faintly smelled of talcum  
And a little less of booze,  
Drove into my neighbors' yard  
And gingerly got out,  
A little gimpy from the drive,  
The altitude, and gout.*

Students can read the entire poem in the film transcript at [www.folkstreams.net/film/39](http://www.folkstreams.net/film/39). Ask them to discuss McRae's use of imagery and irony. The filmmaker used photographs and paintings by Charlie Russell in the film to illustrate the hardships of cowboy life. How would students illustrate this poem?

2. Cowboy poetry is often about everyday life and can be in simple meter as well as free verse. McRae uses poetry to tell "our story" of opposition to strip mining and passion for cowboy culture. Assign students to write a poem in the style of cowboy poetry (see Resources). Like McRae, they might choose a theme about cultural conservation, the environment, or daily life. How would they illustrate it?

3. Invite students to research cowboy poetry, poets, and gatherings and find a poem to memorize and recite in class (see Resources). Other occupations such as logging and fishing also have poetry traditions that they can research.

4. From movie westerns to the Marlboro Man, cowboys are recognized internationally as symbols of the United States. Ask students to think about the appeal of the cowboy image and then write a short essay or poem about this image. What does the cowboy say about our country? Wally McRae describes the importance of the “cowboy code,” which includes hospitality. What values are important to students? Ask them to write down three that make up their personal code on an index card or notepaper and then choose one about which to write a poem to share in class.

### Extensions

Use supplementary contextual materials on Folkstreams.net such as the film transcript and cowboy poetry essay.

### Resources

#### Publications

Astroth, Kirk. *Spurrin' the Words*. Montana 4-H Center, 2004. Order this study guide, including a CD featuring several poets, from [www.montana4h.org](http://www.montana4h.org).

#### Web Sites

See transcript for *Cowboy Poets* on Folkstreams.net [www.folkstreams.net/film/39](http://www.folkstreams.net/film/39)

**American Folklife Center** [www.loc.gov/folklife](http://www.loc.gov/folklife) features the online collection *Buckaroos in Paradise* and the Summer 2006 issue of *Folklife News* on cowboy poetry.

**Smithsonian Folkways Recordings** [www.folkways.si.edu](http://www.folkways.si.edu) includes cowboy poetry

**Western Folklife Center** [www.westernfolklife.org](http://www.westernfolklife.org) sponsors the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, NV, each January. Smaller gatherings happen across the West.

### *The Men Who Dance the Giglio*

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8981448711577019408>

**Excerpt Running Time** 9 minutes

**Filmmaker** Jeff Porter      **Copyright Date** 1995

**Distributor** Not in distribution

**Overview** This documentary of the Brooklyn St. Paulinus Festival explores ethnicity, cultural traditions, and religious devotion as participants and community members explain the significance of the festival and the 2.5-ton *giglio* (pronounced jill-yo), which means lily in Italian, carried by 125 men through the streets of the Williamsburg neighborhood.

Use one of these quotations to spark discussion.

*"The feast is in my blood."*

*"I look at the faces of the guys and I understand, it's very deep. It's rooted right into them since the time they were little kids."*

*"You can't get a sausage, they're gone."*

*"All of a sudden you hear the crowd. . . all the oohs and the aahs and the applause that starts because the people now realize that this structure is actually moving. . . They realize that this is such an extraordinary event they're witnessing."*

**Topics** Festivals, urban life, Italian American culture, sacred and secular celebrations, community, neighborhoods, family, foodways, music

### **Suggested Activities**

1. Brainstorm a list of community festivals and celebrations in your region with students. Choose one to discuss in depth and compare with the *giglio* festival in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn. You may use a Venn diagram. Elements to consider include season, place, history, sacred and secular aspects, organizers, participants, audience, clothing or regalia, music, dance, foodways, customs, layout, admission fee, preparations, beginning, ending, beliefs, oral narratives, advertisement, and so on.
2. As the film begins, viewers hear a male voice singing a cappella in Italian. Later we hear Brooklyn accents, Italian, brass bands, crowds. How would students represent the sounds and sights of a festival or celebration? Divide students into teams to research and design the storyboard for a documentary about different local events such as festivals, homecoming, parades, or fairs. Team roles can include historical research, location research, interviewing, finding artifacts and images, video and audio recording, photography, sound, storyboarding. Teams should present their storyboards to the class.
3. "This feast holds the neighborhood together," says a man in the film. Viewers see only the procession, not the elaborate preparation of the platform and tower that weigh over two tons, band rehearsal, vendor set-up. Hundreds of families in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Williamsburg are involved in this festival. Why do students think community festivals are important? How do they start, who organizes them, who attends, how do they change over time? What are roles for men, women, and children? Ask them to design a T-shirt for a favorite community event that tells the story of the celebration.

### **Resources**

#### **Publications**

Trudeau, Stephanie. "Born to Giglio," *Journal of New York Folklore*, Vol. 31, Spring-Summer 2005. Find at [www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/voic31-1-2/giglio.html](http://www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/voic31-1-2/giglio.html)

#### **Web Sites**

**Louisiana Voices** [www.louisianavoices.org](http://www.louisianavoices.org) Unit IX features resources for documenting festivals and other community events.

**Smithsonian Folkways Recordings** [www.folkways.si.edu](http://www.folkways.si.edu) includes Italian folk songs recorded in New York and New Jersey.