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ABSTRACT

This publication contains 44 suggestions for projects which actively involve elementary and secondary students in an individual quest for a personal heritage within the topical frameworks of community, ethnic, and family history. The projects are intended to awaken students to the realization that history is all around them. The projects utilize the community as a source of learning, assume that the basic motivation for studying the past is essentially personal, emphasize ethnicity, and, for the most part, involve students in out of school research activities. The ideas are general and require the teacher to adjust or adapt them to particular grade levels. Some examples of project suggestions follow. Students research and write their school history. The teacher obtains a set of topographic maps of the county and students begin a process of coding "event cards" to "event numbers" carefully placed in their proper locations on the map. Using a topographic map of the county as a basic reference, students discover the origins of local place names. Students work together as a class to compile a multi-ethnic, multi-generational glossary of community slang. In other activities, students study cemeteries, compile a scrapbook of family history, put together photojournalism essays in county history, and tape old phonograph records. (Author/RM)

BRINGING HISTORY HOME

Classroom Project Ideas for the Texas Sesquicentennial

Prepared by Thad Sitton and Debbie Goodwin

A Publication of

The Texas 1986 Sesquicentennial Commission

Chris Victor Semos, Chairman

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BRINGING HISTORY HOME

Classroom Project Ideas for the Sesquicentennial

Introduction: The ideas in this book present teachers with a variety of options in the general area of "Local History/Community Studies" -- projects large and small, which they and their students may pursue in and out of the classroom. The central assumption is that community studies are (or at least should be) an important part of the public school curriculum.

After all, local history is the history in which students are personally involved and of which they have direct experience. Too often students perceive "history" as an impersonal thing -- something that always happened long ago, far away, and to somebody else -- something written down in textbooks, and having almost nothing to do with them. The projects in "Bringing History Home" present a different view of the past. They actively involve students in an individual quest for a personal heritage within the topical frameworks of community, ethnic and family history.

Hopefully, these projects can awaken students to the realization that history is all around them. As William Faulkner once wrote: "The past is not 'dead'; it's not even past."

Common Denominators of the IDEAS. Certain common assumptions which guided the choice of project ideas in "Bringing History Home" are briefly stated here:

(1) Community Study. The ideas utilize the community as both a source of learning, and as a motivation for students to learn.

(2) A Personal Focus. The projects assume the basic motivation for studying the past is essentially personal -- to find out who or what you are. The projects involve students in an exploration of their own historical and cultural "roots."

(3) A Fieldwork Emphasis. Like the student journal Foxfire and the many classroom projects derived from Foxfire, most ideas involve students in out-of-school researches. The projects require them to search through the family archives of documents and photographs, and to rummage through family attics in search of old books, clothing, and other historical artifacts. Most importantly, these projects require students to interview (and often record) their parents and grandparents to collect the materials of family and ethnic history.

(4) An Enlarged Definition of History. The projects assume that "history" is anything that was used or happened in the past and not just the doings of important persons. This is history considered as "past culture," in the anthropological sense of culture. Hence, history includes the way people farmed the land, preserved foodstuffs and courted their wives (or husbands) -- the whole "way of life" practiced by the students' grandparents.

(5) The Idea of Cultural Pluralism. This is simply the belief that cultural differences should be approached as a positive thing, something to celebrate rather than something to ignore or erase, a diversification and enrichment of community life. The projects do not always place explicit emphasis on ethnicity, but they assume that ethnic diversity will be an important part of their actual implementation. It could scarcely be otherwise; in a multi-ethnic community, "local history" is also "ethnic studies."

Finally, the ideas in "Bringing History Home" are purposely general and require the teacher to adjust and adapt them to his or her grade level, teaching style, and individual classrooms. Most project ideas can probably be used at several grade levels, and no one can possibly be more expert or knowledgeable about making these adjustments than the classroom teacher him/her self.

IDEA 1
A SCHOOL HISTORY

Assuming that your school is not "shiny-new," that it has at least some time depth, embark on a project to research and write its "official" history in honor of the Sesquicentennial. Research school records, old newspapers from the school and community, and (especially) the memories of past administrators, teachers and alumni. Conduct extensive oral history interviews with these "former inmates." Make your publication available to the general community -- it is likely to be very interested! The finished history could take a variety of forms, including: a chronological history of major developments in school life (new wings added, state championship football teams, etc.); a social history of the school through the years (student and faculty dress and demeanor, student pastimes, clubs, etc.), a series of oral history interviews with earlier students, teachers, and administrators, transcribed and published verbatim; etc.

IDEA 2
STUDENT ORAL HISTORY: TOPIC TAPES

Alone, or in research teams, students check out school tape recorders and embark on a variety of topical projects in community oral history.

Students collect various oral testimonies from community residents knowledgeable about their chosen topic. They transcribe and edit these materials, and turn them in to the teacher. (Both tapes and transcripts then could become part of the teacher's resources for teaching local history.)

Suggestions: Practice with the tape recorder beforehand, and read a brief "How To Do It" account of oral history.* Begin the interviewing with a family member such as a grandmother or grandfather, someone familiar to you and not "threatening." After this introduction, other interviews will seem less frightening.

Alternatives: The topical alternatives are almost limitless. Here are a few: "mule farming," "cotton days," "the oil field boom," "coyotes," "snakes and snake lore," "ghost stories," "weather signs," "cattle raising," "wild foods," "old time amusements," "outlaws," "legendary lawmen," "community disasters," (fires, floods, epidemics), "old time crafts & technologies," etc., and etc.

* See: Baum, Willa K., Oral History For The Local Historical Society, Nashville: American Association For State and Local History, 1971. George L. Mehaffy, Thad Sitton, and O. L. Davis, Jr., Oral History For The Classroom, Monograph in the "How To Do It" series of the National Council For The Social Studies, Series 2(8), 1979.

IDEA 3
OLD PHOTOGRAPHS: WINDOWS INTO TIME

Students bring in old photographs from their family collections to be copied and displayed.

A student's family history in photographs may be copied on a Xerox duplicator and the prints displayed in the classroom. (Before copying, photos are affixed to sheets of paper with a drop of rubber cement. This secures them long enough to copy and doesn't harm them.)

The most interesting and historically significant photographs could be copied by the teacher on an Ektagraphic Duplicator and added to the school's (or the individual teacher's) collection of historical slides. The Duplicator, a pre-focused camera for converting photographs (drawings, etc.) to slides, may be found in many schools. These old photos remain priceless records of the local past, literally "windows into time," and both students and teachers perform a great historical service to future generations when they permanently preserve them.* The photographs or slides may be used in the classroom to explore the processes of historical inquiry. Each photo can serve as subject for an exercise in historical detective work, in which students seek to recover the maximum amount of historical information from the photo. This information might include:

(1) the name of the photographer

(2) the photographer's address

(3) the date the photograph was made

(4) notations on the front or back of the photo

(5) the photographic process used (Daguerreotype -- 1839-1856, Calotype -- 1841-1855, Ferrotype or Tintype -- 1855-1874, Ambrotype -- 1848-1880, Celluloid -- 1887-present)

(6) the contents of the photo (physical setting, people, buildings, vehicles, animals, plants, furniture, machinery, etc.).

After careful examination of all evidence, the class might prepare a set of assumptions about the photo, including its probable date, locality, names of persons (if known), architectual period and fashion period.

* See: Sitton, Thad, "Windows Into Time: Creating An Historic Photograph Archive," The Social Studies 70(6): 275-280, Nov./Dec. 1979.

Alternatives: The old photos could stimulate a variety of exercises in creative writing. Students might "imagine" personalities to go with the persons depicted in the photographs and write a short story or sketch about them, a brief fictional account of what happened on the day the photo was made, or simply a personal "reaction" to the photograph.

IDEA 4
MAPPING FAMILY GEOGRAPHY

On an outline map, students plot the movements of their parents and grandparents from birth to the present.

Movements might be charted on U.S., Texas, or county maps, whichever seem most appropriate. Movements (and stopping places) would be marked in colored ink, using different colors for different relatives. Notations beside places of residence on the map would include the rough dates at which family members arrived and left, the approximate time spent at that location, and what they were doing at that time. If the family has the information, the map could follow one family line (the father's?) back into the great-grandparents' and great-great-grandparents' generations.

IDEA 5
FAMILY HISTORY: THE GENERATIONS EXERCISE

Students use a dot symbol (an inked end of a pencil eraser) to illustrate the meaning of the generation concept.

Using a piece of wide paper (butchers' paper, wrapping paper, shelf paper), an eraser and an ink pad, the student places one dot at the top of the paper for him or herself. Then, just below it, the student makes two dots for his parents (the second generation), and below those dots, four more for his grandparents (the third generation). The process is continued through the fourth, fifth and sixth generation, and beyond. Eventually, the student is certain to become impressed by the sheer numbers of his direct-line ancestors. The student can calculate the approximate birthdates of each lineal generation by beginning with his own and then counting back 25 years (as "guess-estimate") for the birthdates of each preceding generation. These approximate birthdates can be listed down the edge of the paper. At some point, the number of direct ancestors will approach the (estimated) number of genes on human chromosomes! Students may very well be direct lineal descendants of kings, queens, princesses and other "great ones," (as well as of "ne'er-do-wells," outlaws, and -- like Jimmy Carter -- "rabbit poachers.") They may find this an interesting point to think about!

Alternatives: Given that students are, on the average, "just as related" to any of their ancestors within a generation, they may wish to explore the reasons for our emphasis upon the male (father's) line. People commonly say "I am a Jones," thus identifying with the Jones family for many generations back, and ignoring (or neglecting) the other surname lines to which they are equally related.

IDEA 6
A COUNTY HISTORY MAP

The teacher obtains a set of topographic maps of the county, and -- as a classroom project -- students begin a process of coding "event cards" to "event numbers" carefully placed in their proper locations on the map.

TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS, already rich with cultural information, easily lend themselves to this historical purpose.

Items noted on the history map might include:

(1) battles

(2) the home sites of early settlers

(3) land grants

(4) trail drive routes

(5) archeological sites

(6) old roads

(7) legends and other "stories" (folklore) attached to particular locations

(8) local business and industrial sites

(9) anything and everything associated with "significant events" in the community past.

Nothing would appear on the map except the "event numbers," which would refer the map user to a description of the significance of that particular location on the corresponding "event card." The map/event card set would be retained by the teacher as a basic resource for studying county history.

IDEA 7
CEMETARY STUDIES

Students embark upon a variety of projects which utilize local cemetaries as historical resources and objects of study.

Cemetaries reflect changing attitudes (and ethnic group variation in attitudes) toward society, community, life, and death. They offer priceless insights into community history. As a field project, a class could do a formal survey of all or part of a county cemetary, preferably one that has not been surveyed before.

The survey procedure includes:

(1) getting permission from the appropriate cemetary association (they will usually be grateful for the class to do this -- to find out about the various associations, contact the county historical society).

(2) making a preliminary reconnaissance of the site to get the general layout, to take photographs, etc.

(3) making the survey -- teams of students move around allotted areas, mapping the locations of all graves, recording all information on tombstones, etc.

(4) and doing the "write-up." Back at the classroom, students draw up a formal map of the cemetary, including all recorded information (names, dates, epitaphs, etc.). Copies of the finished survey would be much appreciated by the cemetary association, the county historical commission, and the local libraries.

Alternatives: Once the data is "in," many different studies are possible. Topics for historical analysis include:

(1) types of gravestones, changes in the types, and frequencies of types over time

(2) changes in the decorative motifs on gravestones

(3) changing styles of epitaphs

(4) changing customs for arrangement of family members within plots

(5) the orientation of graves and the religious significance of this (towards the East, West?)

(6) the languages of the gravestone inscriptions (English, Spanish, Hebrew, German, etc.)

(7) ethnic differences in gravesites

(8) socio-economic differences in gravesites

(9) demographic information (i.e. evidence of changes in infant mortality, evidence of great epidemics -- such as the flu epidemic of 1918, evidence of changes in life expectancy, etc.).

IDEA 8
ORIGINS OF COUNTY PLACE NAMES

Using a topographic map of the county as basic reference, students discover the origins of local place names.

This strategy relates students to local history and cultural geography through a study of "names on the land" -- the place names of the home county. These would be the names of communities, roads, city streets, parts of the county, streams and other natural features. The teacher posts a topographic map of the county area under study. Students research the origins of place names on the map by asking other students, teachers, parents and grandparents, and other local persons who might know the origin of the name. As different theories accumulate, they may be:

(1) printed on the topographic map and

(2) numerically keyed to explanations posted below the map.

Where accounts of origins differ, students try to decide which explanation is most likely to be true, and designate this "most likely" explanation in some way. The "annotated map" could stay with the teacher as an accumulative resource in local history/cultural geography.

Alternatives: A given project could choose to emphasize any of several place name categories -- city streets, rivers and creeks, rural communities, etc. Students should be alert for older place names or streets and communities now known by another name. (For example, Webberville in Travis County was once called "Hog Eye"!) Students could work alone or in teams. They could undertake individual projects in place name origins around their homes, including the local names ("folk names") that aren't on the topographic map. The whole class might work on a single place name at the same time, collecting (and analyzing) the various explanations of its origin.

IDEA 9
LOCAL HISTORY/FOLKLORE FAIR

This project would publicly exhibit the products of a school's "Local History" classes. Modeled upon the science fair idea, it could be held once a year.

The exhibition would be school-wide and open to the general public. It would display the cumulative products of the year's projects in local history and folklore, including maps, "time capsules," "personal time lines," family history displays, artifact collections, taped interviews, folkloric materials, etc. The emphasis throughout would be upon:

(1) students' personal explorations of their family, ethnic group and community histories

(2) ethnic diversity in community life

(3) the re-definition of history to include folklore, crafts, artifacts, "old customs," -- history conceived as "past culture" in the anthropologist's sense of the term.

Alternatives: Display materials could come from a single class, a group of classes, or the entire school.

IDEA 10
STUDENT ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT

After choosing a building which interests them and is at least 50 years old, students "research" this structure.

This could be a house, an industrial building, a store, etc. -- any building that people have lived or worked in. Students would try to get all available information about the structure, both directly from persons who lived or worked in it, and indirectly from courthouse records. This "detective work" would result in a report to the class which might include: photographs or sketches of the structure, a floor plan, a written summary of information about the structure, etc. Some questions students might try to answer are: How old is the building? Who built, lived or worked in it? How has it been used? What happened there? Etc.? Thus, the old building is approached as an important "historical artifact" of local history and serves as a tangible focal point for student researches into that history.

Alternatives: Student research could be keyed to a city or county map. Student-gathered information on county architectural history might be kept by the teacher as an accumulative resource.

As an alternative (or as introduction to individual student projects), a class could research one building at a time, as a class, or as research teams.

IDEA 11
RUBBINGS: IMPRINT OF HISTORY

Students obtain paper and large crayons (or charcoal) and make historical rubbings as a class project.

Suitable things to "rub" might be: old cornerstones on buildings; antique man-hole covers; inscriptions on tombstones; art, and/or lettering on monuments; bronze plaques on buildings; contractors' imprints in sidewalks; cornice inscriptions and designs around the doorways of old buildings; kids' names and other things people scribble into wet cement (grafitti). Rubbing results in tangible

(and decorative) images of community history and may culminate in impressive class displays. A few notes on how to rub:

(1) get thin paper,

(2) tape it securely over the inscription to be rubbed,

(3) pick up the underlying image by rubbing with the edge of the crayon or charcoal (not the end),

(4) periodically sweep off the paper (carefully) with a small whisk broom,

(5) be persistent -- the darker you get the raised surfaces surrounding the inscription, the more impressive will be the rubbing,

(6) if you are using charcoal, spray fixative can be put on the rubbing to keep it from smudging.

IDEA 12
THE SLANG PROJECT

Students work together as a class to compile a multi-ethnic, multi-generational glossary of community "slang." (See "Tri-Cultural Compilations")

This project studies socio-linguistics, or the history of verbal expressions. As a field research enterprise, students might begin with an examination of their own speech -- the slang of public school students. They could then collect slang expressions from their parents' and grandparents' generations.*

These materials could be collected and compiled, separated (if appropriate) by ethnic group and generation. In the process, students could examine various questions about slang:

(1) Why slang, anyway -- what is its social function; how is it used?

(2) Who invents slang; where does it come from?

(3) Why does it become obsolete (and why so rapidly)? Why are people always inventing new slang?

(4) Is there some slang that a person uses with one group that he doesn't with another? Why?

(5) Is slang "folklore?"

Alternatives: Students might study the current slang used by grade-school kids.

Students could collect "nineteenth century slang" from grandparents and great-grandparents.

A student research project could choose an example of recent ("formative") slang among students and try to check how widespread it was and whether students remembered where they first heard it.

Students could try to pin-point the origins of their "fresh" slang.

The class might try an experiment where they "invent" an item of slang and agree to use it in their conversations with non-class students for one week. Then they might study the degree to which it had caught on and with whom (underclassmen?).

* Slang from the grandparents' generation may still retain a real cutting edge. My grandfather once remarked to my younger brother that he "smelled like a gutwagon"!

IDEA 13
STUDENT AS FAMILY ARCHIVIST

In this project, students approach family records (deeds, wills, etc.), letters and photographs as historical documents; they inventory them, and carefully put them in order.

As a class project, as well as for family use, students carefully sift through family records and prepare a historical inventory of those materials. The inventory should list all documents and photographs in terms of some logical framework (by year, person, topic, etc.). Each entry should be briefly described (who, what, when, where, why, etc.), and the original documents or photographs should be carefully marked with numbers corresponding to their descriptions in the inventory.

Students will probably find many unfamiliar items, and should make every effort to locate relatives who can explain these unfamiliar documents or photographs. This historical detective work, of course, is the real challenge of the project, and is precisely the challenge faced by the professional archivist. The family archive provides the raw material from which family history can ultimately be written. The student should leave it in good order, with an accurate inventory to guide family historians of the future.

IDEA 14
ME/US CHARTS

Given a certain space of blank poster paper, mounted on the classroom wall, each student assembles a "Me Chart."

A "Me Chart" displays a montage of those things that the student feels to be most important about him or her as:

(1) an individual,

(2) a family member,

(3) an ethnic group member.

The "Me Chart" may include written materials, documents and photographs from the home, pictures cut out of magazines, small artifacts (objects) -- anything and everything that the student chooses to represent him/her self. The materials on the "Me Chart" should constitute a personal "read out" -- an expression of individuality. Students could choose one important representative item about themselves which they want most to contribute to the class. These self-chosen items combine to form a large "Us Chart" to be displayed in the classroom.

IDEA 15
A SELF-GUIDING TOUR OF THE COMMUNITY

As a group project, the class researches, writes and "publishes" a "Community Tour Guide."

This would include a map of the town, with important historical sites, structures and buildings designated by numbers. The numbers would be keyed to a following text, which would give a brief description of the particular site, structure, or building and a statement about its significance in the community's past. The map would suggest a walking or driving route passing all historical map locations. This "Self-Guiding" Historical map could then be used by school field trips, community residents, and by tourists. A detailed street map of the home community is almost always obtainable, and students might conduct much of the necessary research by phone from school and/or home. The local newspaper and the Chamber of Commerce, not to mention the local (and county) historical societies, will be very interested in such a school project.

Alternatives: Students living in outlying communities could do the same sort of "historical site inventory" for their home areas. They could make Self-Guiding Historical Maps covering those communities, and these individual research projects could be ultimately incorporated within a "master" Self-Guiding Historical Map of the entire county. (Possibilities for inclusion might be: archeological sites, sites of battles, locations of home-places of the county's earliest settlers, and sites of old settlements, historic buildings of all kinds, natural features of particular historical significance, etc.)

IDEA 16
CLASS PROBLEMS RESEARCH

The class members select an interesting and relevant question about county history, individually "research" it at home among their older relatives, and then bring that information to a general class discussion of the problem.

Topics might be (among many, many others): What happened to cotton agriculture in the county? What were travel conditions like, circa World War I? When did the tenant farming system meet its demise? Why is the population of the county much less or much more than it was, say 40 years ago? How did people preserve food before electricity? What was the Ku Klux Klan, what did people think about it, what did it do in the 1920's and what became of it? What was the local history of the prohibition movement, etc.?

Class Problems Research is a deceptively simple (but powerful) formula for involving students in:

(1) the history of the home community

(2) their own families

(3) the practical skills of fieldwork and interviewing and

(4) a consideration of the process whereby the historian arrives at his interpretations of the past.

Working together, students and teacher must evaluate the diverse and conflicting testimonies gathered about these historical problems. Since the history of most localities largely remains to be written, their judgments are as good as anyone's and should be treated with some seriousness.

Send copies of students' research to the County Historical Commission to help them compile a book on county history, or write your own booklet on each topic.

Alternatives: Class Problems Research could result in the class (with the teacher's advise) drafting a summary of the historical evidence pertaining to the problem, as well as the class interpretation of that evidence. Alternately, data that students gather on the research problem may accumulate with the teacher as a teaching resource, and be amended and extended by the research activities of subsequent classes.

IDEA 17
OLD BOOK COLLECTION

As a class project, students go to their parents' and grandparents' attics in search of old books, pamphlets and magazines, and bring these to class.

This project could be a contest, with the theme "the older the better." Afterwards, the collected material might serve as a resource for the study of community intellectual life in past decades. How were people different around the turn of the last century? With what topics were they most preoccupied? Old books can suggest some interesting answers.

Alternatives: All sorts of "then vs now" studies would be possible with this material -- for example, "teenage literature, then and now," "the role of women portrayed in popular fiction, then and now," etc. Students could do book reports on these published materials treating them as "historical documents" and inferring from them the life and thought of the day in which they were written and read. A teacher could gradually compile his or her own collection of books, pamphlets and magazines, or various teachers could jointly contribute to an "old book collection" in the school resource center or library.

IDEA 18
A SCHOOL/COMMUNITY ARTIFACT MUSEUM

Begin a community "artifact museum" to be located at the school -- a museum of tools, farming and ranching implements, household technology -- the common objects of daily life at the turn of the century or before. This would not be a fine arts museum, but a "museum of everyday objects" which, for the most part, have not attained the status of costly antiques. A legacy to future generations, the artifact museum would function as a "hands-on" reference tool to those interested in the daily life of the community's past. Social studies and vocational arts (or agriculture) classes could cooperate in establishing the artifact museum on school premises, perhaps in the industrial arts building. Items on display could be either outright donations to the school, or else "on loan."

IDEA 19
ENIGMAS FROM GRANDMOTHER'S ATTIC: AN ARTIFACT TRUNK

Students seek out and bring to class obscure historical artifacts from their "grandmother's attic" (so to speak).

These are "things" of obscure usage -- historical "junk" of dubious function, often of a mechanical nature. This project makes local history palpable -- something that can be handled and manipulated. These obsolete technological artifacts offer insight into the daily lives of the students' grandparents. The teacher could gradually accumulate an "artifact trunk" (box, whatever) full of items to be used in this fashion. (The Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio has been experimenting with artifact kits as strategy to involve students in Texas history, and the kits have been highly successful.) Artifacts placed in the trunk or brought to class "on loan" during class projects might include kitchen tools, smaller farming implements, etc. -- in fact, almost any kind of physical object.

Alternatives: Items could be brought to class on loan, or donated outright to the class "trunk." Students could try to find articles that would stump their classmates as to what they are and what they were used for (a 20 questions format?). The replica Sears 1897 Catalogue could serve the teacher and class as basic reference to the objects, and students could try to find out more about them by talking to older relatives. If every student donated at least one item, the project would produce a "class museum" of strange "past things" that students could touch, play with, and conjecture about -- "A Hands-On Past."

The class could exhibit this collection as a "grandmother's attic" display, similar to one recently placed on exhibit in the Texas Memorial Museum in Austin. In addition, the artifact collection could be used in the classroom: (1) in a study of the history of technology, as evidence about the changes in technology and to examine the relationships between technology and the rest of society; (2) as clues to the nature of social change (many of these devices were invented to meet social needs that became obsolete and are now forgotten -- the object can be used to discover the social need).

Possible foci for studying artifacts are:

(1) the relationships between "form and function,"

(2) the idea of "cultural survivals" (objects or practices persisting with new functions after old ones disappear),

(3) the idea of "style" and "stylistic change,"

(4) the "evolution" of artifacts over time (and whether this was improvement and/or stylistic change in the evolution of the automobile, the Ball jar, farming equipment, etc.).

Students can be taught an inquiry process in which they "read" artifacts -- moving from an examination of an object's "form," to its "inferred function," to the "inferred social meaning" of the object, to (finally) inferences about the kind of society that the object served.

IDEA 20
INTRODUCTION TO ANTIQUES

An introduction to antiques (furniture, glassware, old firearms, tools, etc.) is combined with a student survey of the "family homes" to which they have access.

This project combines the study of "artifacts as social history" with the motivation of the treasure hunt. The teacher must begin with some knowledge of local antiques and a suitable reference book or two. Classroom study of the categories and styles of furniture, glassware and other varieties of local material culture (antiques) culminates in students' search for valuable items in their own houses and in those of relatives. The inherent interest of social history is thus linked to the fascination of the "treasure hunt." Students later report the survey results to the class.

Alternatives: Old dumps (archeologists make them sound more respectable by calling them "middens") often contain valuable collector's items in bottles and other glassware. Students knowing their location might wish to explore them alone or in teams. Throughout the project, the classroom could serve as a "collection point" for smaller items from home and "midden" brought in to be identified and displayed. Interesting artifacts too large for the classroom exhibit could be recorded on photographs for later study.

IDEA 21
A FAMILY HISTORY NOTEBOOK

Students complete a relatively unstructured assignment by compiling a notebook or scrapbook of family history.

In addition to satisfying a school project requirement, the notebook provides a useful resource for the student and his family. Possible items for the notebook include: old documents, photographs, newspaper clippings, genealogical outlines and/or traditions, family folklore of various sorts (songs, stories, etc.), and an "historical inventory" of documents, photos, "heirlooms," and antiques. The notebook would be a compendium of the student's researches into his or her family history. Students might place their family history notebooks on display at the school.

IDEA 22
WRITING A FAMILY ORAL LIFE HISTORY

With the aid of a cassette tape recorder, students tape-record, transcribe and edit an oral life history of a grandfather, grandmother, or some other (non-related) individual of their grandparents' generation -- that person's own story told in his or her own words.*

There are many possibilities available for such a project, and it could be approached in a variety of ways.

Alternatives: The student could work with his or her subject to create a complete autobiography of the person's life, or a more detailed account of some portion of that life history. Excellent models for the "Oral Life History" may be found in the various Foxfire books published by Doubleday. The life history could incorporate photographs and documents pertaining to the subject. One kind of study (within either of the above categories) would follow a topical focus through the subject's life -- the grandfather's "life as a farmer," for example. In all cases, this life history project involves the student in basic field research among his/her own family and friends.

* See: Sitton, Thad. "The Oral Life History: From Tape to Type," The Social Study (in press).

IDEA 23
"READING AN HISTORICAL BUILDING: A FIELD PROJECT

A class field trip to an historic old house, with emphasis upon studying the house as an "historical artifact" of nineteenth century family and social history.

Thinking about the old house in this way, students "brainstorm" a series of relevant questions with which to approach their observations of the house. During the visit, they formulate some conclusions to their questions. This exercise focuses on the powers of observation -- a "Sherlock Holmes" attempt to "read" the house as historical evidence. After the house tour, the students compare opinions about how they think questions should be answered and generally "debrief."

Alternatives: A very important part of this project involves the preparation of relevant questions, and students should be allowed to arrive at these during class discussion. Possible questions relevant to the family and social history of an old house include (among others):

What are the more flexible and the more specialized living spaces in this house?

Which is "public" (family space and "private" (individual) space within it?

What does the selection and arrangement of furnishings and possessions indicate about past residents?

Is there evidence here about patterns of kinship and family relationships within this family and this society?

Is there evidence about the pattern and pace of work that went on?

How would economic change affect this family?

Can you imagine the sensory experience of living in this house -- smells, sights, sounds, tastes?

What is the overall impression or "feel" of the house -- pleasant, gloomy, pretentious, etc.?

What access to the surrounding neighborhood does this house offer? To the community at large?

How does the house relate to the surrounding environment?

Is it set back from the road and screened off from neighbors, etc.?

Did the family who lived here use the front or backyard as "living space," or just as a buffer?

How does this house differ from an "average" present-day house -- why?

Which differences derive from technological changes (i.e. electricity and air conditioning), and which are due to economic and "stylistic" changes? What were the functions of the various internal spaces in the house?

Were there rooms kept "just for show" and rooms where most of the living went on?

Could the house design provoke family conflict?

IDEA 24
TOPOGRAPHIC MAP STUDIES: "THE COUNTY SPEED GAME"

This game familiarizes students with county topographic maps.

This game follows several days of work during which students become quite familiar with county topographic maps and their symbols. Competing teams (or individuals) would be given the following items: the game topographic map, a 24-inch piece of kite string marked off in quarter inches, scotch tape (or tacks), a pencil and a notepad. In a "play" of the game, the teacher would say (choosing a simple example): "Go from Taylorsville crossroads to the McNeil School." The student teams would then engage in the "county speed game." They must:

(1) locate their starting point and destination on the map. (This can be made quite difficult -- for example, "Go from the small marsh 6 1/2 miles SSW of Gravel Springs School to ...," etc.

(2) Then, students plot the fastest route from start to finish, based on the following figures. Each 1/4 inch across country takes 3 minutes. (i.e. On a one inch to mile map, this represents a foot speed of 12 minutes to the mile.) Each 1/4 inch on an unimproved road takes 1 minute. Each 1/4 inch on a farm road takes 1/2 minute. Each 1/4 inch on a highway takes 1/4 minute.

(3) After plotting the fastest route, students carefully (but lightly) tape their string to the map following the chosen course.

(4) When the last segment of "route string" is down, the student team signals "home" and the teacher checks the team's route and computed time in minutes. The other team (or teams) goes on working to be checked next. Only if they are not ready by the end of the teacher's

check of the first team are they disqualified. If the second team is "home" by the end of the teacher's check of team one, and if they have worked out a faster route, then they win.

IDEA 25
CREATING A COUNTY "TIME/SPACE FRAMEWORK"

In conjunction with a "local history unit," students make a county "time/space framework."

Needed are: (1) a large outline map of the home county (copied from the county road map or topographic map) and

(2) a long sheet of blank paper -- perhaps 15-20 feet long (butcher's paper?).

Both are posted on the classroom wall. The "time-line" is marked off in years, from earliest times to the present. As classroom local history study goes on, locations are noted on the map and corresponding dates are marked on the time-line. Information about an important event is noted on two slips of paper which are then pinned to their appropriate locations in time (the time-line) and in space (the map). As an alternative, students could make a slip of paper to pin to the map (as above) and write that information directly on the time-line.

Alternatives: Students could put personal notes on the "framework" -- birth dates and birthplaces, etc. "Historical" newspaper clippings could be pinned to the time-line, etc.

As the local history unit progresses, the past will visably "gather" on the time/space framework.

IDEA 26
PERSONAL DOCUMENT COLLECTION

Students bring in family documents to be duplicated, laminated (or otherwise preserved) and accumulated in a "classroom document collection."

These "primary sources" of local history could then be used by the teacher in a variety of student assignments. Materials copied should be brief, interesting and evocative of the past, but in general they could be anything -- personal letters, wills, deeds, shopping lists, etc. The originals would be handled with extreme care and returned to the students' families.

IDEA 27
STUDENT HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Students put together photojournalism essays in county history.

Many possible subjects exist for photographic study -- old bridges, historic buildings, the architectural details of a single building, folk crafts (such as sugar-making), etc. These photojournalism studies examine the "visable history" of the home county.

Alternatives: The teacher might specify the number of slides or prints in the project, delimit topics, and require some kind of accompanying text with the photos. The student projects might be placed on general display in the school.

IDEA 28
CONSTRUCTING A TIME CAPSULE

Students make a "time capsule" intended to be opened by themselves or by their children at some predetermined future date.

A time capsule follows the "message in the bottle" idea, except the capsule moves through time and not space. Students choose a suitable container and decide what to include -- what "message" they want to send. Students could collectively discuss:

(1) what to include

(2) the message they want to send themselves or their children

(3) the most useful things for adults (or children) of the future to know about students of today, etc.

Before the "sealing ceremony" (and the teacher should contrive some means of really sealing the capsule), students could display the "non-personal" portion of the capsule's contents. The capsule is then sealed and launched into time.

Alternatives: The teacher could explore the idea of history itself as a sort of time capsule, capriciously allowing some information to pass through time to the present, while allowing other information to be lost.

IDEA 29
FAMILY HISTORY: ROOTS

As an introduction or component of a larger family history assignment, students talk with their oldest family members and collect family historical traditions of the greatest possible "time depth."

These would be the oldest traditions about the family and its origins -- the stories told to students' grandparents by their grandparents. Students seek to discover and record oral traditions that go back as many generations as possible and relate to the origins of the family. These traditions might be of several sorts -- stories about what happened to the family on the way to Texas, old songs or personal anecdotes, etc. -- but the idea is to explore the ultimate limits of each family's "oral folk history." For Alex Haley, the author of Roots, these

were words and phrases from a West African language, and traditions about "an African," so, students should be optimistic! Students write down, tape record (or remember) these materials, and bring them to share with the class.

IDEA 30
CREATING A PERSONAL TIME-LINE

Each student gets a long piece of paper and marks it off in uniform measurements corresponding to the years of his or her life.

On this "time-line" (which may be several sheets of notebook paper glued or taped together), the student records the events of his or her life, beginning with the very earliest memories, and preceding, year by year, to the present. Students should be encouraged to turn to parents and grandparents for additional information about their life. The time-line should be as detailed as possible.

Several days should be spent constructing the "time-line" since students will discover:

(1) some people can remember much more than others, but,

(2) everyone can remember much more than he thinks he can, given the sustained effort.

This assignment attempts "total recall," and the resulting time-line could be very interesting to the student later in life. It could also prove interesting to the teacher, i.e.:

(1) What do children, or adolescents, remember about their life, when they are still children, or adolescents?

(2) Do later "adult" life experiences "wipe out" or replace a lot of these memories?

IDEA 31
OLD PHONOGRAPH RECORDS

Students locate old phonograph records of popular music and bring them to class to be taped.

The records serve as a "primary source" for community, social, and intellectual life in bygone decades. They may be analyzed as evidence for changes in musical content, style, and technology. A class could analyze song titles, topics, and texts for evidence of changing attitudes, values and social concerns across time. Alternately, they could just experience the music as a "time warp" into an earlier day. The music on the old phonograph records could be transferred to cassette tapes for repeated usage in the classroom.

IDEA 32
STUDENT FIELDWORK IN FOLKLORE

Students collect and compile a variety of folkloric materials (stories, songs, "sayings," jokes, riddles, legends, "superstitions," etc.) from their peers, families, ethnic groups, and the community at large.*

Folklore, the "verbal folk art" of the community, is transmitted orally, person-to-person, and is not written down. It varies from ethnic group to ethnic group and from generation to generation (students, for example, have their own folklore). Students and teacher choose a folklore project they wish to embark upon, the target group from which to collect the materials, and the kinds of materials to collect. Students then record the materials (tape-record or write down), and bring them to class for compilation. Collected materials could be retained by the teacher as a steadily-accumulating classroom resource.

Alternatives: Some general categories of folklore are: ghost stories, tall tales, riddles, jokes, skip-rope rhymes, weather signs, "old sayings," folk remedies, "luck", superstitions, grafitti, songs, "lore" about animals, etc. Project possibilities include:

(1) Student research among their families to collect folklore from older (and younger) family members, especially the grandparents -- a "family folklore" project,

(2) an emphasis on folkloric materials collected from older (or younger) members of different ethnic communities -- for example, an examination of the differences and similarities in Black, Anglo and Mexican-American folklore,

(3) student collection of "children's folklore" (skip-rope rhymes, riddles, etc.) from their younger brothers and sisters,

(4) collection of the current folklore among students' peer groups within the school, beginning with what students in the class already know. (For example, do students know the story about "the guy who grew claws," or the "devil's appearance in the roadhouse?" These are common stories in the Austin public schools. And this makes another point. Folklore is not just "old stuff" -- "living" folklore is at least half-way believed in!)

* See: Tallman, Richard S. and A. Laurna Tallman, Country Folks: A Handbook For Student Folklore Collectors, Batesville, Ark., Arkansas College Folklore Archive Publications, 1978.

IDEA 33
THE PLACE-NAME GAME

A project which utilizes topographic maps of the home county as a basic historical resource for studying county history.

Map studies can supplement a general unit in county (local) history or an independent unit in geography. Students first could study map symbols, topography, etc., and learn to read the maps. A variety of possible topics on "cultural geography" may then be targeted for study: Why are settlements where they are -- roads -- railroads? What are the relationships of existing settlements to surface water supplies? Why are certain areas sparsely populated? Which settlements are predominately Anglo, Mexican-American, Black, etc.?

Alternatives: After a day or two on map study, students could test their new knowledge of the county in two map games.

The Place-Name Game. Students compete one-on-one or in teams. The map is either marked off in longitude/latitude lines ("open map" version) or marked off in quadrants ("closed map" version). The student (or team) that is "up" serves a place-name to student (or team) that is in "scoring position." A correct answer (the right longitude/latitude, or the right quadrant, within 30 seconds) (one minute?) scores points for that student or team. Then the team in scoring position is served another place-name, continuing until they "miss." (This simple game can be assimilated to a "baseball" or "football" format and complicated in various ways.)

The map games could be coordinated with other suggested ideas which utilize topographic maps -- the "place-name study," the "Master History Map," etc.

IDEA 34
A MULTI-ETHNIC COOKBOOK (HOW TO HAVE YOUR HISTORY AND EAT IT TOO!)

Students collect, compile and publish a multi-cultural cookbook of community recipes.

The emphasis should be upon obtaining the recipes for ethnically distinctive foods -- family formulas passed down from generation to generation. Along with each recipe, the cookbook should include:

(1) the student who collected it

(2) the name of the person (or family) from whom the recipe was collected

(3) family traditions (history) associated with the recipe

(4) any particular cultural significance attached to the recipe (i.e. prepared only on a certain holiday, prepared "for luck" on New Year's Day, etc.).

Thus, the recipes are used as an introduction to the study of local history and to ethnic variation in that history. The results of this research are compiled in a "Multi-Ethnic Cookbook" as a tangible and useful product of the students' work.

IDEA 35
MAKING AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL KINSHIP CHART

Students construct a kinship chart for relatives living and dead, reckoning all relationships from themselves as "ego."

Students work with parents and grandparents to make the chart as complete as possible. Symbols: males are designated with triangles, females with a circle. Double horizontal lines indicate a marriage relationship. Vertical single lines are lines of descent (parents to children). Single horizontal lines connect brothers and/or sisters. Symbols should be labeled with the person's name, the kinship term for his relationship to "ego" (the student making the chart), and the person's birth (and death) dates. The kinship chart serves as a handy reference for the student's other family history researches, making family relationships clear at a glance. It reveals the "structure" of the student's family and opens the door to a general study of the cultural nature of our kinship system. We are biologically related to a variety of persons, but those relationships are culturally defined. For example, the persons covered by our kinship term "uncle," stand in two very different biological relationships to "ego." One, the mother's or father's brother is related by descent; the other, the mother's or father's sister's husband, is related by marriage.

Alternatives: Other kinship topics include the study of fictive or ceremonial relationships in other cultures, etc. Hence, the chart may serve both as a family history reference and as point of departure for a study of kinship and kinship systems in general.

IDEA 36
THE AUCTION GAME -- CIRCA 1897

The teacher displays a replica Sears 1897 Catalogue with all items covered except the image of one object; students try to guess what the object is, how it was used, and how much it cost in 1897.

The image of an artifact can function much the same way as the actual object (see "Inigmas From Grandmother's Attic" or "An Artifact Trunk.") This project explores community social history circa 1897 by way of the objects -- the "material culture" -- representing daily life at that time. Thus, the Sears replica catalogues offer a marvelous historical reference for discovering and interpreting this "daily life."

IDEA 37
THEN-NOW HOME RESEARCH

Student field research projects in the cultural (social) history of the home county, "then" as opposed to "now."

Students use their knowledge about present-day cultural practices (now) as point of departure for field research into the way those same things were done in the past (then). They explore the past dimension of their research topics by

interviewing their own grandparents and/or other adults of their grandparents' generation. These "home research" projects require fieldwork in the student's own family and ethnic community. The research begins with an analysis of the chosen topic in the present. (For example, students ask themselves what is the contemporary pattern of courtship and marriage, food preservation, etc.?) As they gather information about the "then" aspect of their research topics, the students keep "field-notes" based upon their informants' testimonies. Then they write a brief essay of comparison and contrast, comparing the way things were done circa 1915 with the way they are done presently.

Alternatives: Possible topics for these "then-now" explorations of community life are almost limitless: farming, food preservation, beliefs about ghosts, political attitudes, home heating and cooling, transportation, celebrations and "how to celebrate them" (Cinco de Mayo, Christmas, Juneteenth, Fourth of July, Halloween), customs of group relationships, etc. -- the possibilities are enormous. To the greatest extent possible, students should choose and explore topics of personal interest to them.

IDEA 38
MULTI-CULTURAL COMPILATIONS

This project extends the pattern of the "Multi-Ethnic Cookbook" into other areas of social life; students collect, compile and publish multi-cultural materials on a variety of topics.

The basic pattern underlying this project idea includes the following elements:

(1) an emphasis on cultural differences as a good -- as a resource, an enrichment of community life,

(2) students engage in field research on their chosen topic among older members of their ethnic group,

(3) the students bring the gathered material to class and "identify with it" in some way (show it, perform it, recite it, describe it),

(4) the material is compiled into a "product" of some sort, perhaps a mimeographed publication with copies going to every student's family,

(5) finally, the teacher keeps a copy as an accumulative resource for teaching local history/ethnic studies.

Alternatives: The Foxfire books offer many topics ideas for these tri-cultural projects. Some projects are:

(1) recipes
(2) wild foods (how to locate, identify, process, cook)
(3) ghost stories
(4) hunting stories
(5) weather signs (planting)
(6) customs of courtship and marriage
(7) funeral practices
(8) child-rearing beliefs and practices
(9) folk medicine
(10) stories and beliefs about animals

(11) riddles and jokes
(12) "old sayings"
(13) celebrations and "how to celebrate" them
(14) old folk songs
(15) stories about outlaws and "badmen"
(16) beliefs about dreams and dream interpretations
(17) traditions about what's "lucky" and "unlucky"
(18) slang expressions
(19) inter-ethnic group attitudes, etc.

There are many other possibilities. (Note: It is suggested that students record the materials they collect as nearly as possible to the way their informants relate them -- "word for word," or close to it.)

IDEA 39
LIVING HISTORY: CLASSROOM INTERVIEWS OF COMMUNITY INFORMANTS

Students locate community people with unique life experiences, special skills, areas of expertise (i.e. a blacksmith, a trapper), and other valuable firsthand knowledge about the community past, and invite them to a classroom interview.

This would be an exploration of county history through direct, face-to-face interaction with the persons who lived and experienced that history. Students recruit these resource persons among their own relatives and acquaintances. A list could be compiled of persons willing to come to the classroom, along with the frequency with which they would attend (once?, twice?), and their special area of expertise. Each visit includes the following sequence:

(1) Teacher and students decide on a topic or topics of interest

(2) Students locate a person or persons knowledgeable about the topic and willing to be interviewed by the class

(3) Students talk to parents and grandparents regarding the topic and otherwise gather information about it previous to the visit

(4) Students discuss, develop and select "intelligent questions" to ask the informant during the classroom discussion

(5) The resource person visits the classroom and is interviewed

(6) The class engages in a post-visit debriefing of the interview.

If possible, the interview should be taped for future reference and/or classroom use. (Note: the visitor is doing the class a big favor, so the interview setting should be as low key, informal and friendly as possible. The visitor should be treated in such a way as to make him/her willing to return to this or another classroom.)

IDEA 40
MAPPING PERSONAL TURF

Students design detailed maps of their home neighborhoods.

The sophistication of these mappings varies according to grade level, previously acquired map skills, etc. The map could be to scale and use standard map symbols, but this is optional. The basic idea requires students to compose a map of their neighborhood, their personal "turf", the part of the world they know best. The map should show as much detail as possible, including: houses, streets, trails, hideouts and other secret places, natural features, the locations of significant happenings, etc. Students should include all the current "micro-place names" given to parts of their home neighborhoods, and presently in common use. The assignment is relatively unstructured and creative, and students should feel free to select map colors and general layout. The assignment should last at least two days -- preferably more. Students would "field research" their projects between classes, returning each day to school with more information to incorporate into their map. This exercise examines both cultural geography and local history and requires students to carefully examine everything they know about the most familiar part of their home environment. "Mapping Personal Turf" is an exploration of the personal meaning of place.

Alternatives: Sophistication of the map would vary according to basic map skills, as would the extent of the area covered by the map. The students could do a tentative preliminary sketch from memory, check it out and then begin the real map on the next school day.

Younger students will make up for lack of area in their "home turf" with (probably) the greater detail of their knowledge. They should put in everything -- "kids' trails," secret places, the names they have given to parts of the landscape, things seen and unseen. Their maps should become the "mental landscape" of this childhood home territory.

IDEA 41
PUBLISH A LOCAL FOXFIRE MAGAZINE

Begin publication of a local oral history/folklore magazine patterned upon the student journal, Foxfire. Work on the magazine could go on during Texas History, American History, journalism, English classes, or in special classes set up to research and publish the magazine. Over 200 Foxfire-like magazines are now publishing around the country, many of them with considerable commercial success. (For information about starting a local "Foxfire project," interested persons may contact any of the excellent Texas-based journals. For example: Loblolly, Gary High School,Box 88, Gary, TX 75643; Chinquapin,Douglass School, Box 38, Douglass, TX 75943; Old Timer, Albany High School, Box 188, Albany, TX 76430.)

Alternatives: Instead of a periodical, students could publish a book -- a Sesquicentennial Community History -- on the same general range of topics as the Foxfire Book.

IDEA 42
ORGANIZE A JUNIOR HISTORIAN OR WEBB CHAPTER

In honor of the Sesquicentennial, organize an honorary chapter of Junior Historians in the public secondary schools, and/or a Webb Chapter in the local college or university. (For information on how to go about this, write: Texas Historical Association, Sid Richardson Hall, The University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712.)

IDEA 43
A LOCAL HISTORY PROJECT IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

Approach the local newspaper with the following publishing idea for the Sesquicentennial. Your class (or classes, or school) will research and write a special column on community (or county) history to appear at intervals during the Sesquicentennial year of 1986. These columns will present brief historical essays on various interesting topics. And, assuming things go well, the newspaper staff completes only the final editing.

Alternatives: For a more ambitious alternative to the historical column, work with the newspaper to research and prepare a special Sesquicentennial issue of the local newspaper -- a commemorative edition focused on the community's past. Community historical societies, public libraries, and interested persons in the community at large might work with the school and newspaper on this special issue.

IDEA 44
A PERSONAL FAMILY HISTORY TEST

As introduction to a unit in family or local history, students complete a (non-graded) "personal history test."

Test Questions:

1. What is your father's full name? (first, last and anything in between)
2. Where was he born -- town, state, or country?
3. What is his birthdate? (day, month, and the year)
4. What is your mother's full name? (first, last, middle and maiden)
5. Where was she born? (town, county or state)
6. What is her birthdate? (does she try to keep it a secret?)
7. What are the names of your grandparents? (father's father, father's mother, mother's father, mother's mother)
8. Where (town, state, or country) when (year, at least) were each of your grandparents born?
9. What are (or were) the occupations of all your grandparents?
10. From which country did your father's family come originally? (unless you are a Native American, they came from somewhere else)
11. From which country did your mother's family come originally? (is there a clue in one of those family names?)
12. When did your ancestors (on both sides) first come to this country?
13. Where did they enter this country?
14. What was the first place they settled? (town or state)

15. Which cities or states has your family lived in?

16. How did the town you live in (near) get its name?

17. Who or what lived there before it became a town?

18. Why does your town happen to be where it is?

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15 or more right = EXCELLENT!
10 or more right = Good.
5 or more (or less) = Poor.