

## GETTING STARTED

### Getting Started

How does a person find his or her way in and identify local culture? How does a teacher get started with a class? This brief document suggests some ways a teacher may begin to incorporate local culture into the classroom.

#### Here are some basic principles:

- Look at the familiar in a new way
- Be curious
- Ask questions that go beyond the obvious
- Listen actively
- Enjoy a new experience
- Ask students to actively look and share what they see
- Connect place and human activity

#### And some basic skills:

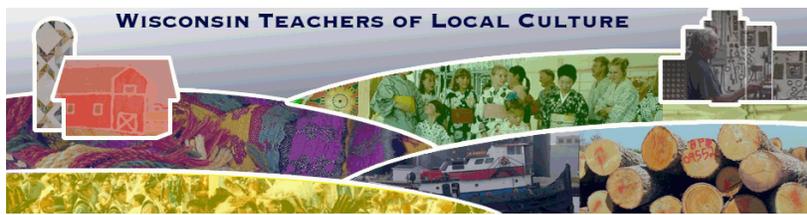
- Observe and Identify
- Research
- Interview
- Document
- Interpret
- Reflect

The Kids' Guide to Local Culture is full of ideas featuring potential exercises in local culture. Written by teacher Mark Wagler with Ruth Olson and Anne Pryor, the entire book is available for download from the "Resources" page on the WTLC website.

### Finding Key Concepts

For much of the late 19th and 20th centuries, a Milwaukee Italian American community centered many of its activities around a church, Our Lady of Pompeii. Every year the congregation held a large outdoor procession where church members carried a statue of the Madonna. But, during the 1960s Our Lady of Pompeii church was razed to make way for freeway construction. About two decades later, members of the Italian community who still remembered the earlier processions decided to organize





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one again. They gathered for a procession near the Lake Michigan waterfront. The occasion drew so many people that it became an annual event, developing into Italianfest. The desire to continue the processions eventually resulted in an annual celebration of local Italian culture. That, in turn, inspired other ethnic groups to organize their own festivals on the Summerfest grounds each year.

This example suggests key concepts in the study of local culture — people, place, and time — and some important aspects and expressions of local culture.

### People

**A group of people** — Italian Americans in the example — share culture. A group can be any size and defined by:

**Family relationship** — relatives who live or meet together;

**Association** — people who regularly gather to do something together, such as members of a sports team;

**Occupation** — people who work together, such as health care providers;

**Ethnic heritage** — people who share ancestry in a common homeland, such as Hmong;

**Recurring events** — people who gather for extended events held on a regular basis, such as participants in the annual religious processions

One person can belong to many different groups, each with its own culture.

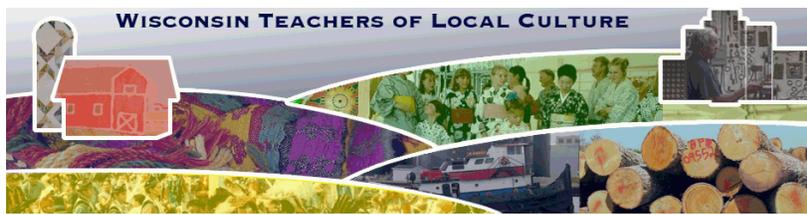
### Place

Together the many different groups in a particular place — families, neighbors, clubs, workers, ethnic associations, cooperatives, religious organizations, civic groups, businesses, unions, local musicians, dance ensembles and more — all contribute to local culture. “Local” connects groups with a locale — a region, a city or a town, a neighborhood, a rural community. In the example, the city of Milwaukee is the place.

### Time

The example suggests that local culture changes through time and is always being created. It may be studied as it existed in the past via library and oral historical research (how the Our Lady of Pompeii procession once was), or it may be documented in its contemporary expression (how the Italianfest now is). The example suggests that even when an expression of culture appears to end, it may sprout in a different way elsewhere at later date.





## Cultural Aspects and Expressions

The example involves people who share an ethnic and religious heritage celebrating their culture at an urban festival that incorporates food, music, and dance, among other expressions. The following brief list identifies a range of cultural aspects and expressions and hints at how local culture can be incorporated into various disciplines in the curriculum.

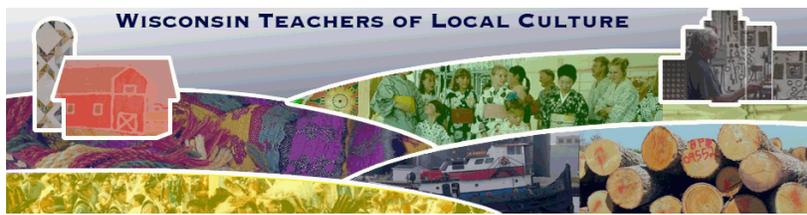
Relationships	Music	Gathering Places
Groups & Identities	Dance	Visiting
Family	Crafts	Recreation
Mealtimes	Clothing	Games
Cooking	Adornment	Celebrations
Farming	Storytelling	Rites of passage
Occupations	Oral Lore	Informal & Formal Learning
Buildings	Language	Keepsakes & Heirlooms
Home Interiors	Communication & Media	Economy
Gardening	Beliefs	Exchange
Landscape	Health	Transportation
Cemeteries	Religion	

### Ideas that Work

Here are some local culture activities that Wisconsin teachers have used in their classrooms:

#### Take a Walk

Angie Hall teaches at Lincoln Elementary School in Madison. Each fall she takes her second grade class on a walk exploring the neighborhood. She asks the class to look all around and notice things. What kinds of buildings do they see? Who lives in them? How would they describe the trees? Are there any gardens? Are any people outside? What are they doing? When the students return to the classroom they discuss what they have seen.



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### **Paint what You See**

Art teacher Chris Steinhagen used local culture in a variety of ways in her teaching at Luxemburg-Casco Intermediate School. Many of her students came from rural communities—small towns and family farms. Chris took students to two different farms to paint on a barn and a silo. They used the kinds of images they knew to be part of the rural life around them, painting animals and plants on the farm structures.

Chris also participated in a project with the nearby Agricultural Heritage and Resources organization that was creating exhibits about life on family farms. She asked her students to create paintings of local farms. Many drew their own family's or a neighbor's farm from their firsthand knowledge. It was necessary for the students to look around, observe the farms, and record what they saw. The resulting fascinating and often beautiful artworks brought a contemporary perspective that merged well with the historical one also featured in the exhibit. The paintings took their place among items displayed in the exhibit.

### **Start with Your Family**

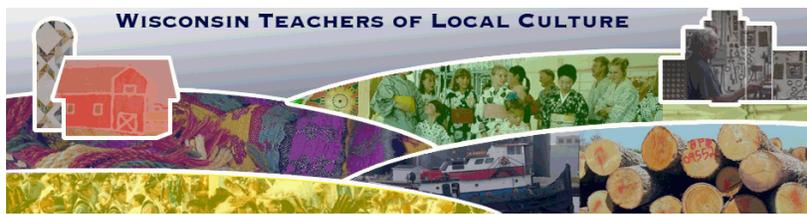
At Washburn Elementary School, where there is an emphasis on inquiry-based learning, first and second graders go every other week to a nearby nursing home. Weather permitting, they walk the six blocks to the nursing home where they interact with the local residents. This walk brings them a familiarity with the community's built environment. The students establish relationships with the nursing home residents whose stories form a fundamental element of the strong fabric of local culture. Other elderly citizens also come to the school to read and tell stories to the children.

Washburn first graders also meet members of each other's families. Once a week, a first grader invites one of their family members to school. Or, in some cases, all of the first graders may visit that person if he or she is within walking distance of the school. In February 2007, first graders walked several blocks to the post office to mail their Flat Stanleys and then headed up to the Leino's Gas Station and Service Station. There one of the first grader's grandparents showed the students around the convenience store: an interesting mix of traditional and innovative. It is a third generation, family-owned business where customers can find typical convenience store items as well as packages of organic foods and locally-produced sandwiches, ice cream, milk, and meats. The popular Tetzner's ice cream comes from less than 5 miles away—a nearby farm and one of the few left in Wisconsin where the ice cream for sale is still made at the farmstead.

### **Have a Multicultural Fair**

Teachers at Jackson Elementary School in Janesville brought local culture into the school. Seeking to draw more parents to the school, the teachers organized a multicultural fair. The fair was held in early May 2007, from 4-6 pm in the school's auditorium. It was comprised of three major activities: an opening world map where students used push pins to identify the countries of their own or their ancestors' heritage; a series of exhibit tables around three of the walls of the auditorium; and entertainment on the stage. The teachers took part and invited the participation of parents.





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Teachers and parents created the table displays around the room sharing aspects of their ethnic heritage. Some focused on foodways with some mouth watering samples. Different classes created attractive signs for the various countries featured. Additionally, one student and her mother created a display showing her crochet work, a skill she learned from the women in her family. She is a member of the fifth generation of her family to create crocheted pieces. The music and dance on stage featured Latino salsa, the student choir, and country-western line dancing. Students, especially, were invited to join the salsa and line dancing after demonstrations by the community members. The teachers considered it a great success with 150 adults and students attending, representing 88 families.

### Focus on World Beliefs

Joni Shahrani teaches 6th grade social studies at Jefferson Middle School in Madison. Joni believes that when students have the opportunity to learn about other peoples' beliefs, they also have the opportunity to develop understanding. Joni is developing a new component for the Ancient Civilizations curriculum that she teaches. It consists of students' introduction to community residents whose religious practices trace their origins to ancient civilizations. The students have visited a local Buddhist monastery, a Greek Orthodox church, an Islamic mosque, a Jewish temple, and a Roman Catholic church. A Hmong shaman visited their classroom. A Hindu family – great-grandmother, grandmother and great-granddaughter – also came to their classroom and explained some of their cultural practices. The students learned about local ancient civilizations and visited effigy mounds. This particular project is extensive, but the approach can also be modified in size to consist of one or two visits.

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