

*When you were my age...*  
*An oral history project on Bayou Lafourche*

**Teaching Louisiana Social Studies and Language Arts  
Standards through Student Interviews with Family and  
Community Elders**



*A paddle wheeler coming down Bayou Lafourche*  
photo by Hector Curole



*When you were my age...*  
*An oral history project on Bayou Lafourche*

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***Photo Credits***

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*"Happiness in Nature"*  
 photo by Cheryl Diaz

The Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program is charged with implementing a management plan for the Barataria and Terrebonne basins. The plan consists of 51 actions that serve to fulfill the vision of the hundreds of stakeholders who participated in its construction.

### The Vision

- Public education and informed citizen participation
- Local, state and national recognition and support
- Maintained multi-cultural heritage
- Sustained and restored wetlands that support viable fish and wildlife resources
- Pollution abatement to protect the health of plants, animals, and people
- Environmentally responsible economic activity
- Environmentally-compatible infrastructure (roads, bridges, levees, railroads, etc.)
- Comprehensive, integrated watershed planning among all users
- Harmonious use of the resources by many interests and resolution of user conflicts

The oral history collection project helps to implement Action Plan

#### SR-5, Cultural Heritage:

*Activities will be supported which highlight the unique relationship between our natural heritage and our cultural heritage. These activities will emphasize the historical connection between the estuary and those who live there. They will highlight the importance of the region's cultural practices in protecting the estuary and its resources.*

We appreciate your participation. For more information and free educational products, please visit our website at <http://educators.btneep.org> or call us at 800 259-0869.



*“Grandpaw and Grandson”*  
photo by Patricia Gonzales

### ***Project Background***

Welcome to the Bayou Lafourche *When you were my age...* Oral History Collection Project. This project is part of a larger effort called the *Bayou Lafourche Initiative* whose goal is to use the rich cultural heritage of this bayou corridor to foster a sense of pride and stewardship for Bayou Lafourche, the heart of the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary.

Southern Louisiana has a strong multi-cultural heritage of history, food, music, language, folklore and lifestyles, all clearly related to the beauty, mystique and richness of the natural resources of the area. Because of the strong ties between the cultural heritage of the Barataria-Terrebonne estuarine system and the area's natural resources, the cultural traditions and unique lifestyles of the estuary are threatened as the overall quality of the estuary is diminished.

Through this intimate exploration of the past, we hope to provide students with a more personal connection to their rich cultural heritage. Through sharing the stories collected with classmates, students will gain an understanding of how decisions and actions of the past and present produce lasting changes to our way of life. A greater sense of stewardship is a natural outgrowth of greater understanding. This project also provides an opportunity for families to record their own history.

### *Project Overview*

- Under the guidance of their teacher, students will make arrangements for a half hour or greater interview with an elder (preferably over age 55) in their family or community.
- Show the video, “Oral History Interview Tips.”
- The student will choose several questions on which to focus (suggestions to follow).
- If time allows, it is recommended that students practice interviewing each other in class before the actual interview.
- Interview will be conducted and recorded using either cassette tape and recorder, or pen and paper, or both. If cassette tape recording is made, student is responsible for transcribing the interview. A digital version of the interview is the final outcome, so the student will type the interview on a computer.
- To get the most out of the project, it is recommended that students make a class presentation on what they learned about the elder they interviewed, as well as how life on the bayou has changed over time. The class could then draw or write a composite picture/story about the bayou as it was in the “old days”.
- Digital transcriptions of interviews will be submitted to the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program either through email or by mailing a floppy disk or CD rom.
- Transcriptions will be reviewed, and select interviews will be compiled in a book of oral histories.
- Transcriptions will also be archived at public libraries for use by researchers or the general public. There may be additional opportunities for presenting the collected information to the public, ie. plays, readings, etc. Credit will be given to both the interviewer and the interviewee each time a story is used.

**Note: In the following interview release form, the DONOR is the person being interviewed (the elder). That is the person who signs. The person who conducts the interview writes their name at the bottom next to “Name of Interviewer”.**

#### **Interview Release Form Bayou Lafourche Oral History Project Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby donate the information contained in this interview to the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program who has the right to use or to offer the information for unrestricted educational, scholarly, or public use.

I understand that I will be given proper credit for the information whenever it is used.

Donor’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Donor’s Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Donor: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

***Thank you for your part in preserving our unique heritage along  
Bayou Lafourche and in supporting our efforts to restore &  
protect the bayou as a valuable natural resource!***

## Extensions & Interdisciplinary Activities

### Social Studies/ Language Arts:

Students can use an event or events from their interview to write a story using fictional characters that center around a real event that happened in history. *Social Studies: 8-GLE-15 (G-1D-M2); English/ Language Arts: 8-GLE-2, 3 (ELA-1M2), 8-GLE-5 (ELA-1-M4), 8-GLE-15, 16 (ELA-2-M1)*

Students can research how the Acadians came to Louisiana. They can discuss the poem, “Evangeline,” and create their own poem on “Cajuns.” *Social Studies: 8-GLE-18, (G-1C-M3), 8-GLE-81 (H-1D-M1); Language Arts: 8-GLE-18 (ELA-2-M3)*

### Science/Social Studies/Language Arts:

Students can research hurricanes mentioned in the Oral History Project. They can make a pamphlet giving detailed information about the hurricane and how it affected the people of Bayou Lafourche. They can also include how technology has helped reduce the number of deaths. *Social Studies: 8-GLE-7, 8, (G-1B-M3); Language Arts: 8-GLE-10, 11 (ELA-7-M2); Science: 8-GLE-33 (SI-M-B4), 8-GLE-39, 40 (SI-M-B7), 8-GLE-19, 20 (ESS-M-A7,8).*

### Writing Prompts or Constructive Response Questions:

- Choose one of the following cultural elements and tell how it has shaped Louisiana’s heritage, e.g.: festivals, music, dance, food, languages. *Social Studies 8-GLE-81 (H-1D-M6)*
- Describe the possible affects that a hurricane can have on an area such as Bayou Lafourche. Come up with at least two solutions as to how we can prepare or resolve these problems. *Social Studies 8-GLE-7, 8 (G-1B-M3)*
- Describe at least two ways in which your life is different from the person that you interviewed (e.g., socially, economically, and politically). *Social Studies 8-GLE-64 (H-1-A-M2)*
- Write a letter to your congressman stating reasons why coastal erosion should be a priority issue in Louisiana. *Social Studies 8-GLE-7, 8(G-1B-M3)*



“Cheniere Caminada”

### Brief History of Bayou Lafourche

Bayou Lafourche is a background of daily life for the residents of Ascension, Assumption and Lafourche parishes, though few recognize the rich history or current value of this 100-mile long body of water. This fork of the Mississippi River was once a bustling transportation and trade route for the linear communities from Donaldsonville to Leeville and beyond. Settlers from many continents joined the resident Native Americans while pirates and traders swarmed the coastal waters. After the damming of Bayou Lafourche from the Mississippi in 1904, both the quality of the water of the bayou and its significance in the eyes of the public began to erode.

In the 1950s pumps were constructed in Donaldsonville to reconnect the bayou to the Great River, but with much less flow than in the grandiose days of old. While the bayou is no longer a major transportation route, it is still the source of drinking water for over 300,000 citizens in a five-parish area as well as the offshore oil industry. It is also the source of water for agricultural interests and industrial operations, and the lower bayou still teems with commerce. Increasingly, bayou residents are recognizing the recreational value of this beautiful body of water, and spend time fishing, crabbing, or simply sitting by its quiet waters. And Bayou Lafourche has the potential for helping us in our efforts to defend our coast from erosion.



## *Message to Teachers*

This project can fulfill a number of the Social Studies and Language Arts GLEs that guide your curriculum. Louisiana Benchmarks for Language Arts and Louisiana History are listed below. For other grade levels, see <http://educators.btnep.org>.

### **Geography**

- 8-GLE-5 describe and analyze the distinguishing physical and/or human characteristics of Louisiana regions (G-1B-M1)
- 8-GLE-8 identify and describe factors that cause a Louisiana region to change (G-1B-M3)
- 8-GLE-14 analyze, evaluate, and predict consequences of environmental modifications on Louisiana landforms, natural resources, and plant or animal life (G-1D-M1)
- 8-GLE-15 analyze the benefits and challenges of the Louisiana physical environment on its inhabitants (e.g., flooding, soil, climate conducive to growing certain plants) (G-1D-M2)

### **History**

- 8-GLE-67 analyze historical data using primary and secondary sources (H-1A-M4)
- 8-GLE-78 locate and describe Louisiana's geographic features and examine their impact on people past and present (H-1D-M4)
- 8-GLE-81 examine folklore and describe how cultural elements have shaped our state and local heritage (H-1D-M6)

### **Language Arts**

- 8-GLE-23 use standard English capitalization/punctuation consistently (ELA-3-M2)
- 8-GLE-36 summarize a speaker's purpose and point of view (ELA-4-M4)
- 8-GLE-42 gather and select information using data-gathering strategies/tools, including interviewing (ELA-5-M3)
- 8-GLE-44 use word processing to draft, revise, & publish (ELA-5-M4)

## *After the Interview*

*You're not finished yet!* Please use the checklist below to complete your Oral History project. Check off each box as you go.

- For those who record their interviews on cassette, play the tape back over and over again and write (or type) the exact questions and answers in the interview. (If the interview is in French, you will also need to transcribe it into both French and English.)
- Type the interview on a computer. Be sure to label it clearly as to name of person interviewed, date, time, and place, subject, as well as your name, grade, school and teacher. Documenting this data is part of the process of recording history!
- Make a copy for yourself, the person you interviewed, your teacher, or anyone else for whom you would like a copy.
- Mail or email a copy of the interview and a copy of the release form to: [deborah@btnep.org](mailto:deborah@btnep.org) or to:

**The Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program**  
**P.O. Box 2663**  
**Thibodaux, La 70301**



### *Sample Questions for the Interview*

Below are some sample questions to ask your elder about life on Bayou Lafourche when he or she was your age. The person you interview might like to talk a lot, or might be pretty quiet, and only give brief answers. You should have two or three of your favorite questions ready in case your interviewee has a lot to tell, but also be prepared to ask more questions in case they don't have much to say.

#### *When you were my age...*

- \* **Where did you live along Bayou Lafourche?**
- \* **How big was the bayou compared to now?**
- \* **Did your parents use the bayou in earning a living? If so, did you help?**
- \* **How did you use the bayou for transportation and recreation?**
- \* **How did you socialize with your neighbors?**
- \* **What types of boats were used on the bayou?**
- \* **What is your strongest memory of Bayou Lafourche?**
- \* **How has life on the bayou changed?**
- \* **Tell me about a hurricane that affected you the most when you were my age?**
- \* **Did you make things yourself that people buy in stores today?**
- \* **What were some important lessons you learned when you were growing up?**
- \* **If you went to school: How did you get to school and what were your school days like? (Were you allowed to speak French?)**
- \* **What types of games or toys did you play with?**
- \* **What kind of medical treatment did you have?**
- \* **What did you do for entertainment?**
- \* **How did the oil and gas industry affect your life?**

In addition to the specific GLEs addressed, an oral history project is an engaging and effective tool for building up the “foundation skills” that the Louisiana Content Standards Task Force established for all disciplines:

#### ***Communication***

#### ***Problem Solving***

#### ***Resource Access and Utilization***

#### ***Linking and Generating Knowledge & Citizenship***

In particular, an oral history project can help students prepare for the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in terms of processing the enormous amount of information available and pertinent to our lives as productive citizens. The Louisiana Content Standards are designed to create competent and independent life-long learners of our students and the “Information Literacy Model for Lifelong Learners” is the basis behind the entire curriculum. Among the tasks identified in this model are many that students will practice by doing an oral history project, including:

#### ***Defining/Focusing***

#### ***Selecting Tools & Resources***

#### ***Extracting & Recording***

#### ***Processing Information***

#### ***Organizing Information***

#### ***Presenting Findings & Evaluating Efforts***

Your participation with your students in this project improves their skills and knowledge, while making an important contribution to our community! For more information on oral history collections in Louisiana, see the BTNEP Education website [<http://educators.btnep.org>].

## *Getting Started*

1. Decide on your equipment – paper & pen, a cassette recorder, or both. Check with the parish media center for recording equipment. Ask the community for donations.
2. One half-hour interview with an older person who has a keen memory for details and the willingness to answer your questions is worth a pot of gold! Start with one interview. Pick someone whom you know well or about whom you know a lot. Explain why you would like to interview them and what kinds of questions you'll be asking.
3. Set a date, time & place for an interview. Choose a comfortable setting – like on a porch or in a living room.
4. Make sure you decide on one theme for the questions you'll be asking before you start the interview. Use the list in this pamphlet as a guide.
5. Test your equipment before you leave and bring along extra batteries and tapes just in case. Bring an extension cord if power supply is electrical. Bring along the release form in this pamphlet to be signed by the person you interview.



*"Beauty of the Bayou"*  
photo by Abby Theriot

## *The Interview*

1. Arrive on time for the interview. Go over with the interviewee the purpose of this project. Explain to them the release form and ask them to sign it. Tell them that an attempt will be made to inform them when their interview is used in a document or played for the media or an event.
2. Explain how you plan to record the interview and the importance of speaking clearly, slowly and loudly.
3. Announce on the recording or note on paper who you are, who you are interviewing, the date, time, and place, and the purpose of the interview: "to collect the history and stories of Bayou Lafourche." Then begin asking questions.
4. Always start the interview by getting some basic biographical information about the person you are interviewing. For example, where and when were they born, where did they mostly grow up, how many people in their family, etc.
5. If the interviewee gives answers that are too short, ask them to elaborate on interesting points. You can say, "Can you tell me more about that?" or "Can you describe what that was like?" Try not to ask questions with yes or no answers.
6. When you are finished, thank the person you have interviewed and ask them whether they would like a copy of the interview. Let them know when you are likely to get them a copy.
7. Just a few "don'ts!" Don't interrupt the speaker and don't make comments except to keep the interview flowing along.
8. Check that your equipment is working during the interview.