

Lomax the Songhunter

Premiere Date: August 22, 2006

Lesson Plan

Preserving Folklife in Your Community

Jump to:

[Activity](#) | [Assessment](#) | [Resources](#) | [Standards](#)



[Download the Lesson Plan PDF](#)

OVERVIEW

This classroom activity is designed to be used in conjunction with the film **Lomax the Songhunter**, Alan Lomax (1915-2002) earned a singular place for himself in American culture and arts. Building on the pioneering work of his father, John, whom he accompanied on folk-song recording tours of the American South and Southwest in the 1930s and 1940s, Alan set out after World War II to do nothing less than draw the folk music map of the world. This classroom activity has students explore the role that music plays in their lives and think about the role it plays in the lives of others.

POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, POV offers a [lending library of DVDs](#) that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE! Please visit our [Film Library](#) to find other films suitable for classroom use or to make this film a part of your school's permanent collection.

During the first part of this activity, play the songs from the website special feature, [Alan Lomax Radio](#).

ACTIVITY

- Ask students to write in their journals for a few minutes about the role that music plays in their lives. When and why do they listen to or make music? Who typically creates the music they enjoy the most? What themes and topics are addressed in the music that students like? Briefly discuss student responses.
- Explain that a man named Alan Lomax believed that mass media silenced the music of everyday people whose songs didn't necessarily fit into a commercial mold. To preserve the music of the working class, he traveled around different countries in a van and collected thousands of folk songs using portable recording equipment.
- Show students an approximately five-minute video clip from **Lomax: The Songhunter** where a woman in Scotland thinks back several decades to when Lomax visited her home and recorded a work song sung by women gathered together to "stretch the tweed." Ask students to note details about the music they will hear. The clip is nine minutes into the film and begins with an excerpt from the 1950 field diary of Alan Lomax, "I didn't know what was coming to my recording machine..." Stop at 13:30 with ladies waving goodbye as the van drives away.) Before the clip begins, explain that the video will show images of Lomax when he was both younger and older. They will also see Peter Kennedy (bald with a T-shirt and suspenders), a British folk song collector who worked with Lomax.
- After watching the video, ask students to describe the work song that Lomax preserved during his visit. What about the process of "stretching the tweed" could have inspired such music? What did the work song tell about the community in which these women lived? What is the value of such recordings made by Lomax?
- Have students use the Library of Congress resource, [Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman's Introduction to Field Techniques](#) as a guide to collect a song, story or other folk life treasure from their families.
- Gather student work together in a book, wiki, public exhibit or some other method of showcasing their folk life collection for the community.

[↑ Top of Page](#)

RESOURCES

[Special Feature: Folklife and Field Recording](#) This interview with veteran folklorist Michael Taft discusses the state of collecting folklife today.

[Special Feature: The Songhunter's Trail](#) Watch four additional scenes from **Lomax: The Songhunter** that show some of the people that filmmaker Rogier Kappers' met while retracing the European field work of Alan Lomax.

[Alan Lomax Collection](#)

The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress describes Lomax's career and provides select artifacts and products of his field research.

[↑ Top of Page](#)

STANDARDS

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/.

Arts and Communication, Standard 5: Knows a range of arts and communication works from various historical and cultural periods.

Geography, Standard 10: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.

U.S. History, Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

[↑ Top of Page](#)

Posted on August 17, 2006 | Updated on May 26, 2009

Learn more about: [Lomax the Songhunter](#)

If you enjoyed this feature, you can further explore the topics of [Arts & Culture](#), [International](#).