

Handed Down at Home

October 2025 Lesson: *The Stories We Keep* (Material Culture & Storytelling)

Lesson Objective & Connection to Folklife

The goal of *The Stories We Keep* is to help families see that history isn't only found in books or museums — it lives in our homes, in the stories we tell, and in the things we choose to keep. By sharing the memories tied to familiar objects, families take part in the same tradition that folklife celebrates: the everyday ways people express who they are and where they come from.

Through this activity, children learn that even simple things — a toy, a quilt, a recipe — can hold deep meaning. These stories connect generations, preserve cultural identity, and remind us that we all have traditions worth handing down.

Material Culture & Storytelling

Material culture is the study of everyday objects and the meanings people attach to them. The quilts, tools, instruments, and keepsakes we pass down tell the story of who we are — what we make, what we value, and how we live.

In folklife, *storytelling and material culture go hand in hand*. The stories behind objects keep traditions alive and connect generations through memory, creativity, and shared experience.

What is a Tradition Keeper?

Across cultures, *tradition keepers* are the guardians of heritage — people who help carry a community's history, culture, and values forward. They serve as living bridges between generations, passing on stories, skills, and ways of life that define who we are.

Tradition keepers might be elders, artists, teachers, or community leaders. Through their storytelling, craft, or everyday example, they guide others — especially young people — to stay connected to their roots while growing into the future.

At home, family members become tradition keepers too. The things we cook, the songs we hum, the photos we frame, and the objects we save all carry meaning. By sharing the stories behind these everyday items, we pass along not just possessions, but a sense of belonging and identity.

Activity: The Stories We Keep (Material Culture & Storytelling)

The objects we use and treasure are records of who we are. By sharing their stories, we connect the past and present in everyday life.

1. **Choose an object:** Pick something meaningful from your home like a photo, recipe card, heirloom, favorite mug, or old toy.
2. **Share its story:** Talk about who it belonged to, when it was used, or why it matters.
3. **Ask questions:** Encourage your child to wonder. Ask things like: "Who gave this to us?" "What did it mean back then?"
4. **Imagine together:** Ask how this object might be used or remembered in the future.
5. **Reflect:** Talk about how the story connects your family across generations.

Ways to Expand the Lesson

- Create a small Family Museum — a shelf or box where meaningful items live, each with a short note.
- Draw or photograph each item and write down its story in a journal.
- Call a relative and ask about an object in their home — record the story if possible.
- Encourage your child to choose one of their own items to add to the family's stories.

Fun Folklife Fact!

In Texas and beyond, many families keep heirlooms that reflect their community's traditions - handwoven quilts, carved walking sticks, musical instruments, or recipes passed down through generations. Folklorists and museums often study these items to learn how people lived, worked, and celebrated. Each object tells a story if you know how to listen.

Share With Us!

What stories live in your home?

Share a photo or note about your family's special object using **#HandedDownAtHome** or tag **@TexasFolklife** to join next month's feature!

About Handed Down at Home

Handed Down at Home is a monthly family activity series from Texas Folklife. Each lesson celebrates the everyday traditions — stories, songs, foods, and crafts — that connect us to one another and to the many cultures across Texas.