

★ *TEACHROCK* ★

Hometown Documentaries – User’s Guide

Overview:

Inspired by the Dave Grohl-directed HBO series *Sonic Highways*, TeachRock’s Hometown Documentaries project offers teachers and students the opportunity to embark upon a large scale research project that explores the musical history of, and breathes life into the area many students find the most boring--their hometown.

With guidance from TeachRock, teams will research the musical history of their areas in libraries and archives, conduct interviews with parents, family members, local musicians, venue owners, historians, and fans. They’ll compile their research into a film and create a portrait of their town’s musical history - A town they thought they knew before, but now seen quite differently.

The TeachRock Hometown Documentaries are a dynamic, hands-on way for students to explore local history through music, problem solve, work on creating long form narratives, and engage in basic filmmaking. Completed films shine in students’ portfolios, demonstrating their ability to work in groups, organize and finish a major project, and apply scholarly concepts to real-world tasks. It is a truly interdisciplinary learning experience.

Assembling a Team:

- Teachers can work alone with their student groups or collaborate with another teacher (i.e. - a social studies and music teacher, history and film studies teacher, etc.).
- Student groups should not exceed twelve people.
- Teachers should consult with the school’s technology person who may have cameras, tripods, or technical advice.

Research:

- Cast a wide net, investigating any bit of subject matter or history that seems to have been interesting in your town. Encourage students to pursue any lead that may emerge from an interview (see sample interview questions below). The final film will likely not include everything that is captured during the filming phase, but all discoveries and investigations will inform the story that students are trying to tell.
- Investigate the various forums where music happened, from concert venues and clubs, to streets, homes, churches, and on the radio, etc.
- Explore the history of former music spaces using all available resources. The students will look first to the internet, but the local library, historical societies, city clerk’s offices, and other local entities often have information.
- Gather and organize archival materials, from newspaper clippings to maps and video clips, still photographs, and anything that helps convey the story. This is material that can be filmed and edited in to the final product.

- Encourage students to pursue a “master narrative” while researching, asking questions such as, “taken together, what does all this research say about our town in 1982?” This will help students refine their data as they move toward editing the film.

Pre-Interviews:

- We suggest that students conduct “pre-interviews” with parents, grandparents, or even neighbors who lived in the area. These do not need to be on camera. The purpose of pre-interviews is to get a sense for who might be good for a further, on-camera interview.
- *Note - A good interview candidate does not have to be a musician or even know one. Anyone with stories to tell about the town is an interview candidate.*

Sample Interview Questions:

- How long have you lived in _____?
- What music did you listen to when you were young/when you were first living in _____?
- Was there a local radio station you listened to? What kind of music did they play? Was there a DJ you liked in particular?
- Did you ever go out dancing? If so, where? Can you describe the place and the music played?
- Did you go out to listen to music? Where? Can you describe some of what you saw when you went to see music?
- What did your parents and teachers think about the music you liked?
- What do you know about the history of this place? What’s important about it?
- If you had to explain to a stranger what makes this place special, what would you say?
- How would you describe your neighborhood? How has it changed?
- NOTE: If you know about any historical venues or events in your town, they are a great way to jog the memory of an interview subject. For example, ask, “Did you go to the Rock n’ Burger festival on the green in 1972?” Or, “Do you remember things happening at J.P. Snodgrass Grill?”

Interviewing:

- At the conclusion of pre-interviews, have the team discuss “casting” - picking the best subjects who had strong, emotional responses to the questions.
- The pre-interview and research phase should also help students identify interview subjects with strong ties to the music of their community - People who knew the venues and went to them, went to the music stores, knew the radio personalities, and the musicians themselves.
- Once subjects for the documentary have been identified, ask them for any photographs or other archival materials that might help support the story they are telling.
 - For example, if a parent or grandparent is talking about their youth, a photograph of them as a young person will be an asset.

Filming:

- Before actual filming begins, students should “script” their film and ask themselves:
 - What histories are the most compelling?
 - What are the major themes?
 - Who are the major voices?

- Though the script is essential to serve as a blueprint for the project, students should be prepared to augment with unexpected stories that are discovered along the way.
- Have students watch professional documentaries in preparation of filming and ask:
 - What makes a documentary compelling?
 - How do the scenes change in a documentary to keep the viewer engaged?
 - What makes for a good interview?

Equipment:

- A standard HD video camera is preferable for filming. However, not all schools will have one at its disposal and students are encouraged to use whatever technology is available.
- A cell phone video will often suffice, if set up appropriately (tripod and external microphone to capture audio).
- Questions for students to consider while filming -
 - Should the interviewer be off-camera?
 - Should the interviewer be off-camera but still be heard?
 - What's a location that is quiet enough for interviews?
 - Will the interviewee be comfortable and look good in the location selected?
 - Is there a tripod or another way to secure the camera available so that the shot is steady?
- Be sure to have students test all equipment for sound and image before cutting footage for the film. Never wait until the day of the shoot to have a run-through with the equipment. And **always** charge batteries and have back-ups!
- After filming, **be sure to backup your content on a hard drive**. Make copies of copies.

Editing:

- Teachers and/or students will need some understanding of how to get filmed content from your camera/phone to whatever computer will be used for editing.
- Final cut, Adobe Premiere, and iMovie (included on most Apple computers) are standard programs for editing footage. iMovie is usually the most easy to use and intuitive for students, however students involved in a film studies course at school should use whichever program they have been introduced to by their teacher.
- It is best practice to create “buckets” of footage
 - Before editing, organize segments by subject area in the folders and hard drives they live in
- Be mindful of changes in audio levels. Different interviews, stock footage, etc. will often vary in volume. Students should establish a consistent volume level throughout the film.

Archival:

- Throughout the process, students should be finding still images, historical clips, newspaper headlines, and so forth that supports the subjects being discussed.
- Additionally, the team should capture “B-roll” of the places being discussed.
 - If a particular artist is the subject, film his/her house and neighborhood.
 - That content can be used in the section in which that artist is being discussed.

- For B-roll, audio is not a concern. It is content meant to support a section of film.

Music:

- Students will want to gather the music to support the stories being told.
- Some music will be celebrated and easily accessible songs. Other songs being discussed may be more difficult to obtain. Feel free to reach out to us for assistance.
- It is best to create a “musical bed” behind much of the footage. Students should accumulate music (instrumental is often best, but not obligatory) that can be used to fill in any “gaps” in the film.

Key Points for Constructing a Film:

- The students are characters in the story being told! While they will lead as filmmakers in this project, what the students discover along the way is the essential narrative of the film. Their fingerprints should be all over the film — on camera conducting interviews, doing research, etc. and creating any voiceover work that needs to be done. B-roll and behind the scenes photos and video should always be kept in “buckets” during the project, as they will come in handy when moving into the final editing phase.
- Look for not only the obvious choices as interview subjects (i.e. musicians), but also parents, grandparents, relatives, neighbors, etc.
- To ensure the best quality audio possible, make sure to conduct interviews in a quiet place and, especially if relying on the camera mic, position the camera close to your subject so it clearly picks up every word.
- Keep the frame tight on your interview subject (and your interviewer if they're in the shot). You'll notice in many documentaries the narrator is shot from the chest up so that their facial expressions/nonverbal cues are clearly seen.
- Try to keep the questions and topics at hand central to the location--the music and the history of the students' hometown.

Key Points for Constructing a Film:

All film treatments will be evaluated based on the rubric outlined below. Only the most well-rounded submissions will be given the green light for production as part of TeachRock's Hometown Documentaries Program.

A film treatment makes a case for why this documentary, why now.

Submitted film treatments should include:

- A logline -Two to three sentences providing a description of your films location and people/ subjects to be covered in the film.
- Preliminary list of interviewees.
- Preliminary list of original interview questions.
- List of musical acts from or associated with your area (this can include out-of-town musicians who performed in the area).

Criteria	1	2	3	4
Organization	Treatment is unfocused, demonstrates little narrative organization.	Treatment demonstrates a cohesive narrative.	Treatment demonstrates a cohesive narrative, outlines intended sequence of events.	Treatment presents a fully articulated narrative which is easy to follow, with detailed description of intended sequence of events.
Connections	Treatment demonstrates inappropriate or no connection between time, place, and music.	Treatment establishes a connection between time, place, and music.	Treatment makes appropriate connection between time, place, and music in a historical context or cultural context or biographical context.	Treatment makes insightful connections between time, place, and music and in two of three contexts: historical, cultural, or biographical.

- Brief paragraph describing what the group already knows about their hometown and what members hope to learn through this process.

In the treatment, please indicate the number of students planning to participate and whether or not your school has access to filming equipment.

We look forward to seeing your stories!