

Preserving Local History

Introduction

Students love learning about the history of their own communities, but these histories rarely appear in standard history textbooks, which generally focus on major national and international events. This lesson combines the skills of reading, research, and writing, and asks students to look closely at their local community and tell one of its stories. Students will consider how a historical place becomes recognized as a historic site, and craft a proposal to preserve a historical site important to their community's history.

Essential Questions

1. Why is it important for people to know their local history?
2. What qualifications should be met for historical preservation?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

Identify and define the important people, places, and events of local history.

Articulate the difference between the words “historic” and “historical.”

Determine which local historic sites should be preserved.

Make connections between local history and major national and international events.

Activity

1. Have students review the National Register of Historic Places Guidelines provided on the National Park Service website: <https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/guidance.htm>
2. As a class, generate a list of local sites that might be good candidates for historical preservation.

3. Have students define “historical” and “historic” and explain the distinction between these terms.
4. Assign students to committees to research a local site they believe should be preserved. Students should locate maps, photographs, and newspaper articles, and possibly interview longstanding community members to uncover the history of the site.
5. Students will use their research to create a timeline charting the events and changes that have taken place on or around their chosen site. Have students add important national and international events to the timeline to help them understand the connections between the local site and national and global history.
6. Have students follow the National Park Service guidelines for nominating a property for the National Register of Historic Places. The application requires a short essay detailing the historical significance of the proposed site. You may want to have students review sample nomination applications before drafting their essays:
https://www.nps.gov/nr/sample_nominations.htm