



KENTUCKY
HUMANITIES

Presents

Our American Story:
Kentucky's Voices

Harmonizing Together

With support from





Harmonizing Together

A Community Conversation Guide

Music has always been more than just sound. It is a way of coming together and of speaking when words fall short. From church choirs and bluegrass jams to high school bands and front porch pickin', music reminds us that our voices matter and that every person helps make the song complete. Music carries stories of faith, struggle, celebration, and belonging, and it teaches us how to listen to one another even when we don't all sing the same tune. This guide is designed to spark conversation about how your community is *Harmonizing Together*, and to create space for people to share how music shapes their lives and relationships.

Kentucky Humanities presents *Our American Story: Kentucky's Voices*, a statewide series of community programs and discussions that invite

communities across the Commonwealth to share their unique traditions and experiences with one another and with the nation. Together, these stories help tell a broader story of what it means to be a Kentuckian, reflecting on the past 250 years and looking toward the future.

Our American Story: Kentucky's Voices is part of the national initiative *By the People: Conversations Beyond 250*, a series of community-driven programs created by humanities councils in collaboration with local partners. The initiative was developed by the Federation of State Humanities Councils and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. *Our American Story: Kentucky's Voices* is also supported with funding from the America250KY Commission and the Kentucky Historical Society.

Kentucky Humanities Presentations

Harmonizing Together

The following Kentucky Humanities programs connect especially well to the Growing Together theme and can serve as conversation starters for your event. More information about each presentation along with presenter contact information can be found [here](#).

Kentucky Chautauqua®



Aunt Molly Jackson
Pistol Packin' Woman



Loretta Lynn
Mem'ries of a Coal Miner's Daughter



Jean Ritchie
Damsel with a Dulcimer



Mary Settles
The Last Shaker at Pleasant Hill

Speakers Bureau



Dr. Kathy Bullock
I Got A Right to the Tree of Life: Women's Suffrage and African American Women's Voices/ Singing in the Spirit: The African American Sacred Music Tradition



Jerry Deaton
Appalachian Culture, Yesterday and Today



Michael Johnathon
Kentucky and the Music of America's Front Porch



Dr. Ron Pen
Echoes of the Hills: Kentucky's Traditional Music/ Sweet Strains of the Dulcimer



Nancy Richey
Mose Rager: Kentucky's Shy Guitar Master



Let's Talk

Tips for Meaningful Humanities Discussions

Community conversations can be inspiring, meaningful, and sometimes a little challenging. It takes a little care to help people feel comfortable sharing. As a discussion leader, your role isn't to have all the answers but to create space, guide the flow, and invite conversation. The tips below are meant as support, not rules. Use what works best for your community.

- Keep the conversation casual to encourage shared exploration, not debate.
- Whenever possible, create more intimate, welcoming spaces for conversation. Avoid large conference rooms or theatres when possible. Consider theatre-in-the-round style seating or around a smaller tables to make it easier for people to share with each other.
- Introduce the program using the Introduction in this guide.
- Start the conversation with a story or anecdote that people can relate to. You might consider identifying one or two people who will be at the event ahead of time. Talk to them about sharing a story about this theme. This will allow you to start off the conversation by calling on them for that story to get conversation started or to redirect back to storytelling when conversation starts to lag.
- Ask open-ended, layered questions. The discussion questions on the following pages are just a guide. Move from surface level questions like, "What do you think/notice?" to questions like, "How does this connect to your own experience?" As the conversation continues, consider questions that are forward-looking like, "What does this suggest about our future as a community?"
- Listen more than you talk. Try paraphrasing an answer, thanking people for their input, encouraging curiosity, and inviting others to respond.
- Balance the voices in the conversation and keep things moving. Invite people who haven't spoken yet, and remember that listening is also a form of participation.
- Be ok with some tension. It's okay if not everyone agrees all the time. Differences of perspective are part of community. When tension arises, you can help by emphasizing shared experiences or values.
- Allow participants time to reflect and process as you near the end of the discussion. Consider a question like, "What do you want Kentucky and/or the nation to know about your community?" or, "What is one word or phrase you're taking away from this conversation?"
- Be sure to thank participants for sharing and encourage them to participate in your documentation process (written, video, audio, etc).



Let's Talk

Discussion Questions

These questions are grouped by topic and are meant to spark storytelling and reflection. You do not need to ask them all. We have bolded a couple key questions to help, but you are free to choose what feels most meaningful for your group or even add your own questions.

Community and Connection

- What kinds of music bring people together in your community? Can you share a time when you saw that happen?
- Where do people gather to make or enjoy music – churches, schools, porches, community centers, local festivals?
- Are there songs or musical traditions that many people seem to know or recognize? What memories or stories are connected to them?
- **How has music helped your community through difficult times, or helped mark moments of joy and celebration?**
- Does music in your community feel more like a family tradition, a shared community activity, or something shaped by larger events and industries?

Tradition and Change

- What musical traditions have been passed down through your family or community?
- **Have you noticed changes over time in the kinds of music people listen to or play locally? What do those changes seem to reflect about your community?**
- How have changes in technology – from radio and records to streaming – shaped the way people listen to, share, or make music here?
- Are there older songs, instruments, or musical styles you hope will be preserved for future generations?
- How does music connect to other traditions in your community, such as dancing, cooking, worship, or gatherings at home?
- Did your family bring music traditions to Kentucky from another state or country? How have those traditions changed over time?
- What do writing, poetry or storytelling have in common with music? Do you find some methods are more intuitive to you or more common in your community?



Expression and Understanding

- How does music help people express who they are, where they come from, or what they care about?
- Have you ever connected with someone different from you through music? What stayed with you from that experience?
- What can we learn by listening to music that feels unfamiliar or outside our comfort zone?
- When people make or listen to music together, how does it shape the way they understand one another?
- In what ways does music help your community tell stories or remember important people and events?
- When you think about making music, what role do instruments play and what role does the human voice play? Are they both essential or is one more important than the other to you?
- **How does music reflect everyday life in your community, such as work, hardship, faith, or hopes for the future? (examples include: coal mining songs, weaving songs, church singing, shape-note music, or call-and-response traditions)**
- Has music ever played a role in inspiring activism or encouraging change in your community?
- Can you share a moment when music helped you better understand someone with a different point of view?

Place and Identity

- How would you describe the “sound” of your community or region?
- Are there local musicians, songs, or events that feel especially rooted in your area’s history or landscape?
- **How does Kentucky’s musical heritage — from gospel to bluegrass to hip-hop — show up in your local community?**
- What do you think your community’s music says about who you are as Kentuckians?

Looking Ahead Together

- What do you hope the next generation will carry forward from your community’s musical traditions?
- How can music continue to help people bridge differences and work together?
- **What do you want Kentucky and the nation to know about your community through its music?**

Our American Story: Kentucky's Voices

Introduction

Kentucky Humanities presents *Our American Story: Kentucky's Voices*, a statewide series of community conversations that invite people to share the traditions, experiences, and stories that shape their communities.

Music has long been a powerful way for people to come together – to celebrate, to mourn, to work, and to make meaning together. The songs we sing, play, and pass down carry memories of family, faith, struggle, and joy, while also pointing toward the future we are building together.

Today we are talking about how our community is *Harmonizing Together*. We're here to listen, reflect, and learn from one another – and to hear how music shapes your life and your sense of community.

For use with a Kentucky Chautauqua® or Speakers Bureau presentation:

We'll begin by hearing from [Presenter's Name] about [brief description of the presentation]. After, we'll invite you to share your own experiences and reflections as part of our community conversation.

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Once you have completed your program, please use the QR code or click [here](#) to complete your Final Report. This form will allow you to upload pictures, A/V, and other relevant program documentation.



Sponsors



KENTUCKY HUMANITIES

Kentucky Humanities is an independent, nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, D.C. Kentucky Humanities is supported by the National Endowment and by private contributions. Kentucky Humanities is not a state agency, but is a proud partner with Kentucky's cultural, heritage, arts, and tourism agencies. Since its founding in 1972, Kentucky Humanities has invested more than \$20 million in public programs for Kentuckians. Learn more at kyhumanities.org.

The Federation of State Humanities Councils

Founded in 1977, the Federation of State Humanities Councils (Federation) is the membership organization of the 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils. The Federation supports, connects, and amplifies the work and voices of its members, demonstrating councils' value for communities and their collective impact on civic health and cultural vibrancy. Learn more about the Federation and its member councils at statehumanities.org.

The Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

The Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage promotes greater understanding and sustainability of cultural heritage across the United States and around the world through research, education, and community engagement. The center is a research and educational unit of the Smithsonian that produces the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, the Cultural Vitality Program, the online Folklife Magazine, exhibitions, symposia, publications, and educational materials. It also maintains the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections. Learn more at festival.si.edu.

The Kentucky Historical Society

The Kentucky Historical Society (KHS) was formed in 1836 by a group of prominent Kentuckians intent on preserving the history of the Commonwealth. KHS is a membership organization with members from Kentucky and around the world. KHS is part of the Kentucky Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet; has full American Alliance of Museums accreditation; and is a Smithsonian affiliate. Learn more at history.ky.gov.

