



NEBRASKA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

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N E W S R E L E A S E

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Vietnamese and Swedish kits available for youth

The Nebraska Humanities Council is accepting reservations from teachers, librarians, museum curators, and other Nebraska educators to use its new educational trunks, “Children of the Dragon, Citizens of the Plains: Nebraska’s Vietnamese Americans” and “Välkommen Till Nebraska: Nebraska’s Swedish Americans.”

The trunks are available for a three-week loan, free of charge on a first-come, first-served basis, to educators and community groups statewide. These “cultural encounter kits,” created for students grades 4-8, provide Nebraska youth a better understanding of the Vietnamese and Swedish cultures and their rich traditions in our state.

To reserve a trunk or see a list of other offerings in the NHC Humanities Resource Center, visit www.nebraskahumanities.org. Reservation forms and information are also available by phone at (402) 474-2131.

These new educational resources were developed by the Nebraska Folklife Network, a non-profit arts and education organization that promotes cultural understanding through the state’s traditional arts and folklife. Each lesson in the kits is tied to state social studies/history and reading/writing academic standards.

The new kits join the popular NHC kits on Nebraska’s Germans from Russia and Mexican Americans, introduced last year as part of the NHC’s major program emphasis, *The New Nebraskans*. All four of the kits contain a teacher’s manual with lesson plans and handouts; youth-sized traditional clothing; examples of cultural items such as crafts, cooking utensils, music, and games; and age-appropriate teaching materials that include bilingual and English language books, laminated photos, media, and maps.

A \$10,000 grant to the NHC from the Peter Kiewit Foundation of Omaha and a \$2,500 contribution from Union Bank and Trust of Lincoln to the Nebraska Folklife Network funded the development of the kits. Additional support for the trunks and other Nebraska Folklife Network projects is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts-Folk and Traditional Arts.

The kits have explored similarities and differences in immigration patterns by pairing a more recent Nebraska immigrant group (such as Mexican Americans and Vietnamese) with an earlier group (Germans from Russia and Swedes). Teachers report positive results after using the Mexican American and Germans from Russia kits in the classroom, according to Gwen Meister, folklorist with the Nebraska Folklife Center.

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“Kids especially enjoy interviewing each other about their own folk groups when learning about culture,” she said. “It helps them get to know each other in a different way than their usual classroom interactions.”

Vietnamese constitute the state’s largest Asian American population group. Nebraska also has a large number of Swedish Americans and several communities that celebrate their Swedish heritage. So it’s likely that youth from both ancestries will participate at sites where the kits are used.

The many resources in the kits can be used creatively to teach youth who learn in different ways. The practical and user-friendly lessons, bilingual books, media, and artifacts illustrate a variety of cultural celebrations, music, crafts, foods, history, religious expressions, language and stories. The kits’ information promotes increased cultural knowledge and understanding.

“Excellent kit! You’ve done a great job of providing plenty of resources. And the kit is formatted in a way that teachers can take only what they need or want to use,” said Cindy Simonson, a 4th grade teacher at Sandhills Elementary School in Halsey.

Each kit is expected to travel to an estimated 25 schools and youth organizations during the school year, reaching at least 3,750 people annually. Additional kits pairing Iraqi and Irish cultures in Nebraska are scheduled for production by the 2007-2008 school year.

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