# Tips for Using Equipment

## Photography

Teachers find that disposable 35mm cameras work better than other inexpensive cameras and create better prints. Buy fast film or disposable cameras (400 ASA is ideal) and urge students to make sure they have as much light as possible before shooting. They should also avoid backlighting (shooting a subject in front of a window, for example). Build film processing into your budget and photography practice into your schedule. As digital equipment is more affordable, you can make use of prints, scanners, digital images, and photocopies to create PowerPoint presentations or simple printed presentations. See **Kodak, Guide to Better Pictures** for guidance on photography and **Indivisible, Educator's Guide** by the Duke Center for Documentary Studies for useful activities for working with photographs and taking documentary photos. The photos work well in publications, and if you still have slide projectors, slides are more affordable to process than prints and can be used easily in presentations. With computer scanners and color photocopiers more affordable, you will be able to make excellent use of color photos.

Digital cameras are good for studying technology, which can intersect with folklife. For example 5th-graders conducting fieldwork in a small Virginia town were surprised when they returned to school to plug a diskette from their digital camera into the classroom computer. A fuzzy white blob marred the photo of a local church. "That's the ghost!" the students shouted. The church is famous for its ghost, and parents were quick to marvel at the coincidence--high-tech and folklife intersecting.

Whatever camera you use, be sure to label prints, slides, diskettes, or memory cards with pertinent information: date, time, place, photographer, subject (see **Photo or Slide Log**). For digital pictures, students will need to develop a Contact Sheet, which is a printed page of thumbnail images with their numbers and names. Designing and keeping logs are important aspects of fieldwork. Label each slide or print to identify its corresponding log sheet. Write lightly in pencil on the back of prints or write on a label, then stick the label on the back of the photo. Make extra copies of good photos to give interviewees as a way of saying thank you. Make sure they have signed a permission form before being photographed (see **Written Permission Form**). Digital photographs can be used for a computer slide show or multimedia stack.

## Tape Recording

Various types of tape recorders abound, from boom boxes with built-in microphones to tiny hand-held digital recorders. Archivists still recommend analog cassette tapes since no one knows how stable all the different digital formats will be. A recorder that uses standard-sized cassettes is preferable since these cassettes are easier to edit, duplicate, and use for presentations. You can do a lot with an inexpensive cassette recorder if you also invest in an inexpensive hand-held microphone instead of relying on the built-in mike. The mikes

plug into the recorder and come with small stands, which should be hand held or placed on a non-vibrating surface when students are interviewing.

Buy the most expensive microphone you can afford. The microphone is the most important component in recording, and the price directly reflects quality. Working in teams is a good idea for beginning fieldwork practice and for building collaboration. If working in teams, students can divide tasks. A sound check is essential to set volume levels, ensure mike placement is correct, and identify potential problems such as wind and background noise. Place the microphone on a computer mousepad to help sound quality. If you don't have a microphone stand, prop the mic on an opened cassette case and use something handy to hold it in place. Make sure that the blank tape leader has been wound past and that the tape is properly inserted. Students should begin by stating their name, date, place, interviewee's name, and purpose of interview. Some permissions may also be given at this time, with the interviewee stating that he or she gives permission for the student to record and use the tape for educational purposes (see **Written Permission Form** or **Oral Release Form**). Again, giving interviewees a copy of fieldwork products is a nice idea, a way of saying thank you. Copy a final product as a gift, if your budget allows, or place tapes in a community archive. High-quality audio recordings can be used for websites, radio programs, and public presentations. Students should complete a **Tape Log** for each tape.

## Videography

Video cameras have become ever smaller and more available. Planning how to record an interview, a craftsperson at work, or a traditional community event requires practice and forethought. In addition to mastering operations, students must calculate how many tapes or how much digital memory the project will require, decide whether a team or individuals should tackle the video shoot, choose a tripod or hold the camera steady, check the sound for background noise or wind, watch for backlighting and other problems. Students should complete a **Tape Log** soon after taping while memories are fresh. **Learning from Your Community** provides detailed instructions on assigning students roles to research and produce a video. Editing videotape can be tedious, so consider involving a media specialist or other expert if possible when developing a polished product. Perhaps local television stations or cable companies would donate engineers or time in their editing labs. Videotaping a slide show or PowerPoint with student scripts is another way to go. Some schools are equipped to use video clips on classroom computers. Again, sharing a copy of a product with interviewees or writing thank-you letters describing the project is polite.