An Ethical Field Guide to the Bayou

01 / TEACHER GUIDE | 9–12 | 6–8 studio sessions (50–65 minutes)

Artistic investigation

How can visual documentation connect ecology, land use, and community futures?

Local context

Atchafalaya and Bayou Vermilion. Begin with the authentic documentary photograph linked in the lesson webpage, then consult the listed primary cultural or institutional source. Distinguish what the image actually shows from wider claims about an entire culture.

Learning targets

Students will investigate photographic sequence, map layering; gather visual evidence; generate at least three original ideas; choose a purposeful composition; create a sustained work; and visibly revise after feedback.

Final evidence

A six-page field-guide prototype with sources and access notes

Louisiana arts alignment

VA-CE-H1, VA-CE-H3, VA-CE-H7 (Creative Expression benchmarks for the associated official grade cluster). This is an instructional alignment, not an approved course or credential equivalency.

Supplies

Sketchbooks or paper; pencils and erasers; one locally available medium selected by the teacher; optional collage scraps, colored pencils, paints, cameras or tablets; printed or projected reference image and source caption. Adapt for allergies, ventilation, tool safety, and classroom resources.

Instructional sequence

1 Engage

Display the documentary reference photograph without a title. Invite Notice / Wonder / Evidence responses. Ask students to distinguish observation from assumption.

2 Investigate

Read the source caption and place the image on a map. Ask: Who made, uses, preserves or performs this? Whose viewpoint is visible or missing?

3 Skill Studio

Demonstrate photographic sequence, map layering. Model one failed attempt and one revision, without making a finished image for students to reproduce.

4 Generate

Students draft at least three clearly different compositions related to the question: How can visual documentation connect ecology, land use, and community futures?

5 Plan

Students choose one proposal, annotate intended audience and name the two or three visible features needed for success.

6 Produce

Develop the original artwork: A six-page field-guide prototype with sources and access notes. Use observed structure from references, but make new visual decisions.

7 Critique

Partner critique: identify one evidence-based strength, a question about cultural context, and one visual feature needing greater clarity.

8 Revise

Students make a meaningful visible change and document before/after evidence, not just decoration.

9 Present

Title and display or share the work; include a brief source note naming the historical or cultural references consulted.

10 Reflect

Students identify a successful artistic decision, evidence supporting it, and the next technique they will practice.

Culture and inclusion guardrail

Avoid romantic views that omit land loss, Indigenous stewardship, or working families.

Offer a neutral alternative subject for students who do not wish to disclose family, identity, religion, or home history. Provide translation/interpretation only from a verified source. Credit named tradition bearers.

UDL and extension

Offer physical objects, projected photos, large-print references, oral planning, supported tracing of student-created photos, and multiple media if the artistic criteria remain equivalent. Extend by analyzing a second source or viewpoint and documenting a more complex revision.

Teacher assessment checkpoints

Before: observational sketch + knowledge question. During: three ideas, one modeled technique and conference. After: original artwork, documented revision, source note and evidence-based reflection.

Reference trail

Atchafalaya National Heritage Area — https://www.experienceatchafalaya.com/

Louisiana Arts Content Standards — https://doe.louisiana.gov/docs/default-source/academic-curriculum/louisiana-arts-content-standards.pdf