Skowhegan Area Middle School, Skowhegan, Maine

Promoting Community History

Skowhegan Area Middle School students are working with the Maine Historical Society, the Skowhegan Library, the Skowhegan History House, Margaret Chase Smith Library, and members of the local government on two interrelated community development projects designed to promote new cultural and business ventures for the community. The "Run of the River" project promotes Skowhegan's location on the Kennebec River as a whitewater training facility for canoe and kayak enthusiasts across the northeast and beyond. The expansion of the student-designed and run community website will promote Skowhegan as a heritage and historic destination.

Essential Question

How can Skowhegan's history, culture, and natural resources be used to revitalize the economy and future of our community?

Project Overview

Skowhegan has a long, colorful history, much of which is directly associated with its location on the Kennebec River. In the early nineteenth century, thousands of immigrants from Canada and Ireland traveled down the Kennebec, settling in Skowhegan – the first major town encountered in the new world. Working with Laura Richter, the school's technology integration specialist and longtime history teacher, grade 7 and 8 students are capturing their historic research and place-based histories on a community website that includes:

- A brief town history;
- Digital copies of historical photographs, documents, journals, and artifacts that illuminate life in the community;
- Online exhibits that explore topics, people, and events in the town's history;
- Oral history interviews;
- Brief imovie documentaries;
- Links to local historical and cultural organizations;
- Information about current preservation issues and events.

One of the student economic revitalization projects on the town website is the "Run of River Project." The hope is that a kayak run through the gorge can be engineered that will attract visitors to the town. The students have designed a logo and interpretive signs for this project, and will be included in various phases of the project as it evolves.

Project Goals

This project will enable students to:

- Learn about the history of their community;
- Learn to do research, handle, interpret, and catalog historical material;
- Conduct interviews, create exhibits, and develop related projects;
- Develop research, writing, technology, and personal communication skills;
- Achieve key learning results;
- Work with people of all ages throughout their community;
- Provide valuable services to local organizations; and
- Create resources that teachers, students, and other people throughout their community and beyond will use to learn about the history of their town.

Find out more about all of the projects online at
http://www.msad54.k12.me.us/MSAD54Pages/SAMS/Heritage/Heritage.html or
http://www.msad54.k12.me.us/MSAD54Pages/SAMS/cedarsite/commweb/skowproject/skowindex.htm.