

Start a “literature for us” harvest to create a bank of literature to draw on for life-changing individual or community events.

Audience for this recommendation:

Educators at all levels; Civic leaders; Humanities Councils.

At life-changing moments, people draw on literature for celebration, comfort, solidarity.

This is true for us as individuals. At times of great life change--when marrying, welcoming a child, or saying goodbye to a parent who has passed--we reach for a treasured poem, novel, or author. They say best what we want to say in our heart but do not have words for. There are no words; yet somehow literature gives us words.

And this is true for communities, small and large. How many times during shared celebration, grief, or shock do we turn to literature--for example, when we mourn a tragedy in our city or nation and gather to reassert who we are and continue to be? At such times, just listen to the poems and other literature peel forth. Words do matter. They help make and repair us. Literature and the humanities are a foundry of words that matter when things matter.

WE1S’s study of the media shows that the humanities appear to the public to be siloed in the academic world (see [KF-5-2](#)).

Working with the community on a “literature for us” harvest is one solution.

Try this:

→ **Partner your university with civic leaders or local organizations such as libraries and humanities councils to engage citizens in a multilingual “literature for us” harvest.**

Related to the idea of “history harvests” (see A-5-3), “literature for us” harvests are

organized, community-based initiatives to create an evolving reserve of literature that individuals and groups can easily draw on for their lives. For example, organize students to work with the community in gathering from all cultures, groups, and languages the song lyrics or poems that have gotten people through hard times.



Wheat harvest on the Palouse, Idaho ([public domain](#))

→ **Create a crowd-sourced online platform for “literature for us” harvests.**

Various channels for engaging a community in harvesting “literature for us” are possible, ranging from social media to online content management systems or cloud drives. University digital humanists and librarians could work with community leaders to plan an accessible, sustainable platform for materials; provide ways to access copyrighted text that cannot be stored directly; and clarify fair-use rules.

→ **Don’t neglect non-digital methods.** A “literature for us” harvest should also involve face-to-face ways of engaging a community. For example, organize a way for students to ask their parents for poems that were important to them in weddings, funerals, and other life-changing moments. Or ask which books grandparents brought with them when they immigrated.

Resources

* **Research backing up this recommendation:**

[KF-5-2](#)

* **Related materials:** WE1S Bibliography: [Public Humanities](#) | [Value of Humanities](#)